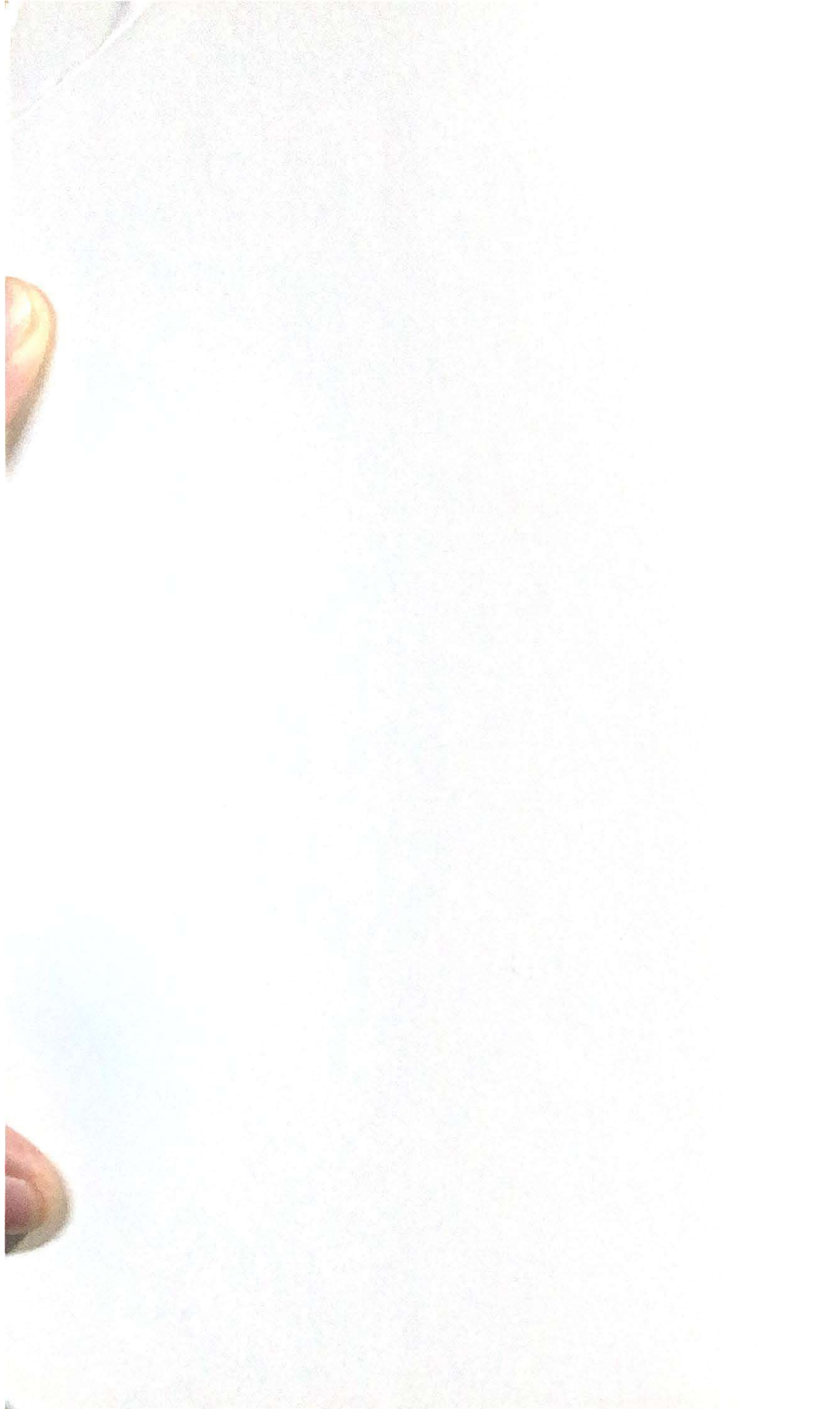


WHY

*I
Am a*

Presbyterian

Walter W. Bryden



Why I Am a Presbyterian



Bryden in Print

Why I Am A Presbyterian

Based upon addresses delivered to students in Arts and
Theology in Knox College, University of Toronto.

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Sola gratia, sola fide, Deo soli gloria

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Why I Am a Presbyterian

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EDITORS' NOTES

This new edition of W.W. Bryden's *Why I Am a Presbyterian* is presented with a minimum of editorial change. Except for minor matters of punctuation, it is offered as it first appeared in 1934.

Although some of the aspects of the Church Union issue are no longer of interest, it is hoped that the foundational arguments will still find listening ears. In the matter of language, Principal Bryden was a child of his age, and no attempt has been made to alter gender in an attempt to update its usage.

The editors wish to thank Prof. Kenneth Bryden for his kind permission to reprint his father's work. Thanks are also due to the Experimental Fund of the Presbyterian Church in Canada for a small grant to set the project in motion.

The Editors

PREFACE

This edition of *Why I Am a Presbyterian* was to have had a Preface by Rev. Prof. Donald Vance Wade, but his untimely death in February 1997 left his intention unfulfilled. In its place, we include some of his expressed ideas on the work of his friend and mentor, Walter Williamson Bryden, taken from a monograph he presented to the Barth Colloquium on March 22, 1974.

Professor Wade reported a conversation with a colleague, who said that Bryden's *Why I Am a Presbyterian* might be better called *Why I Am a Christian*, for it went beyond the bounds of a denomination to the very heart of the faith itself. So it may appear to modern readers. He also noted that, although Bryden wrote these lectures in the 1930's, when the Church Union movement and its aftermath were living memories, much of what he wrote was of permanent value and should be read as such.

The issues with which Bryden deals in this book are with us today, sometimes in new disguises. The struggle between Church and state, between faith and secular society, continue from age to age. Bryden saw these as issues which were soon to break out into open conflict, as indeed they did in World War II.

Wade drew attention to this: "I recall an electrifying moment when Bryden was discussing State 'religion'.... [He said,] 'The Cross is the success of Christianity. The Cross is revelation... it shows us not only what God is, but what man is... therefore, it is always an offence. The reason we hate

Hitler is because we see our face in his face: If necessity arise, if anyone dare to take away our real treasure, which is not God, despite our lip-service, but our way of life, our possessions, prestige, social or national status... we can be ruthless with a lust to kill under the pretext of keeping peace and order! The universal human is always Judas... even the disciples were so imbued with this spirit that they asked, "Lord, is it I?" We all make our gods to suit our purely human or material interests."

Wade pointed out that Bryden put out searching questions about Protestantism. "The tendency toward collectivism, totalitarianism, mass movements, corporate achievement... and the consequent suppression of individuality, entrusting our thinking to a higher authority, and gaining so-called 'security' by giving up freedom... all of these mean renouncing our most decisive human responsibility and are sure signs of the trend away from the principles of Protestantism. We Protestants may ask: Has Protestantism in the course of its history neglected too much the corporate nature of Christianity, or has it substituted a secularized individualism (private judgment) for the true individualism of faith? In terms of the Christian faith, is not the antithesis between individualism and corporateness a false antithesis?"

"In season and out of season, ever and always," Wade observed, "Bryden hammered away at the question, *What does it really mean to believe in God and what is the nature of such belief?* The calamitous nature of false beliefs has never been so clearly evidenced as in these days!" Bryden's address in Hamilton in 1943 on the occasion of the Tercentenary of the Westminster Confession of Faith illustrates his approach: "True faith in God is always a thing which goes very much deeper than mere activity... (note)... the sin of

modern Christianity and the reason for the absence of spiritual power and confident assurance in the Church is the simple fact that we have lost all sense of the sheer human impossibility of the work to which Christ calls us. Believing in God in the Christian sense has nothing in common with having God as a patron... even Hitler, not to mention Churchill and Roosevelt think God is on their side!"

Wade also noted that "Bryden foreshadowed the 'Hope' theology of the '70s, especially in his teaching that sensitivity to human injustice and oppression is made more acute under the hope of the Gospel. He warned that after World War II there might be a tendency for the Church to confine itself to such matters as promoting better social conditions, a fairer distribution of this world's goods. No one can legitimately disparage this kind of activity and genuine concern for human welfare, but such can be so much more helpful and promising if based on the Gospel."

"The real threat to Christian faith," Wade observed, "lies not in science, even though it may appear to have slain the gods, *but in the domestication of the radical faith of Jesus Christ in the middle-class society*. It was this domestication which gave rise to a reaction in Nietzsche and others who proclaimed the death of God. 'No wonder,' said Bryden, 'that intellectuals and highly sensitive ethical people and the great majority of the working classes have become unchurched!'"

With all the wisdom of hindsight, present-day readers of *Why I Am a Presbyterian* will discern the fulfillment of the prophetic teachings of Principal Bryden. In the truest of senses, "he being dead yet speaketh."

EXPLANATORY NOTE

As indicated on the title page, the material set forth in this volume is largely based upon addresses delivered, at different times, to students in Arts and Theology enrolled at Knox College, Toronto. These students had themselves requested that I should speak to them concerning what I deemed to be the significance of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and, indeed, had suggested the specific title which I have adopted for this book, namely, *Why I Am a Presbyterian*.

Any inclination which has been mine to prepare the addresses for publication has come primarily from the students who were present when they were delivered. Certain of them believed that one of the addresses in particular, if published, would help to meet a very definite need felt among students, both men and women, who, at the time, were under preparation for special service in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Since that time, requests of a similar nature and from quite different sources have come, with the suggestion that I should prepare some sort of thesis on Presbyterianism in Canada, designed to meet the need of people, both old and young, who have been deeply interested in the welfare of the Presbyterian Church. It has occurred to me, therefore, that the time might now be ripe to present a view of Presbyterianism, as it has existed, and does still exist, in Canada, which aims at doing some justice to those deeper religious motives which had so prevailed among a large body of solid, if often silent, people, as to oblige them to remain loyal to their Church

when a union of Churches was being consummated in this land in 1925.

Accordingly, I have endeavoured to meet such requests, and the need referred to above, by revising the addresses delivered to the students, by amplifying these very considerably wherever I deemed that necessary, and by incorporating certain material on the subject from lectures delivered to a group of ministers at Glenmohr Summer School. At the suggestion of certain of my friends, I have broken the rather lengthy addresses into suitable short sections. These sections appear as chapters in the book. I have decided, at the same time, and for various reasons, to retain, so far as that might be possible, the more intimate form of the spoken address. I therefore make no apology for the personal note to be found throughout the book, because the peculiar nature of those conditions which originally gave rise to the addresses determined the particular form they should take. I do regret, however, that for the same reason, it has been necessary to present my argument with very special reference to the United Church of Canada, and to those claims which were made as to the necessity for a union of the Churches in this country. It will be recognized that I could not well state my personal reasons for remaining in the Presbyterian Church in Canada without reviewing in some way the controversy which took place in this country, and without considering those conditions which fostered it. I can only trust that I have not misrepresented, in any important respect, the situation as it actually existed at the time. I have endeavoured to be free of prejudice, and to give emphasis alone to those things which I deemed to be all-important. I realize, however, that it must be left to the judgment of the reader as to whether or not I have succeeded in this regard.

In conclusion, let me say that I am well aware there are views of Presbyterianism quite different from that presented in the course of these addresses. I realize, too, owing to the fact that the manuscript has been prepared in haste, that in certain places I may have over-emphasized, and in other places underemphasized, such claims as I have made on behalf of my view of Presbyterianism. I am persuaded, however, that the Presbyterianism here set forth represents *essential* Presbyterianism, and, moreover, is recognized as such, especially by those who have been at pains to know and understand it in its more original and more universal forms. It is, at any rate, the only Presbyterianism which appears to possess particular significance, and a particular challenge, for the present day.

It should be pointed out that the last chapter, under the heading "Conclusion," did not belong to the original addresses, but was written later, and incorporated in the book, with a view to indicating the lines along which Presbyterians should endeavour to cultivate their Christian life and work.

Finally, I desire to acknowledge the kindness of my friends, the Rev. Joseph Wasson of Calvin Presbyterian Church, Toronto, and the Rev. Norman A. MacEachern, Editor of Presbyterian Publications, for reading the manuscript and making helpful suggestions; also to the former for his assistance in the correction of the proofs.

Walter W. Bryden
Knox College, Toronto
9th April, 1934.

INTRODUCTION

I believe I can appreciate, at least, to some extent, the motive you have had in asking me to speak to you on this particular subject. There has been, and is, at the present time, a very general feeling abroad (one, perhaps, especially pronounced within University circles), which is of a nature growingly antagonistic to any undue emphasis being placed on "Denominationalism," as among those religious interests which should have the concern and respect of serious and sensible people. It is assumed among many people, in view of the perplexing practical problems confronting the world and the Church in this age, that it is not only the part of un wisdom, but also a sign of obstinate insensitiveness to the great moral and spiritual realities of life, to continue to recognize, and especially to stress, differences which, though having been real enough in past ages, have ceased to have vital meaning for the present age in which the practical necessities and interests of religion have at last acquired their rightful place. The assumption is tantamount to a conviction that the tendency of our times, in view of such patent facts, is, and ought to be, entirely toward a union of the various Churches. And it is further suggested that such union must primarily and fundamentally be based upon humanitarian, rather than upon strictly ecclesiastical or theological considerations, or, in fact, upon the supposition that the imperative necessity for greater efficiency, and the increased and invigorated strength, which it is confidently assumed, would be acquired through unity, constitute the paramount needs of the modern

Church. Or to put it, as a certain individual (once a minister of the Canadian Presbyterian Church, but at present a feature-writer in one of our newspapers), in a conversation with myself some time ago, brusquely and dogmatically stated it: "All the great leaders of Church life in Canada and elsewhere are favourable to union; and it is simple presumption for anyone to put himself in opposition to a movement which indisputably represents the mind of the vast majority of the religious people of today."

This is a view which is doubtlessly widely prevalent, and I think I ought to warn you, therefore, that if there are any of a similar way of thinking among you, I am not likely to have much of interest to say to them on this subject. Indeed, the essential claim to be made in these addresses will be largely based upon the conviction that, although a real unity among the Churches is a thing highly to be desired, and continually to be sought and prayed for, such union can never be finally realized upon those grounds alone, which have been so insistently proclaimed and advocated, in recent years, as the reasons imperative for its achievement. Moreover, it seems to me that it must be obvious to anyone who possesses the slightest acquaintance with the really important religious literature of the Protestant and Catholic Churches, that the truly great religious leaders in both of these Churches are, for the most part, quite skeptical concerning any particular possibility of a wide spread and genuine union among the Churches at the present time. Even the desirability of a union, based upon such reasons as have been advanced, would be considered a very questionable matter among such men.

Not a few, indeed, have suggested that this urgency for union, rather than being a sign of any particular spiritual discernment or attainment on the part of the modern Protestant

Church, is strictly an indication of a vague consciousness of its own fundamental weakness (a condition inhering in its very nature and constitution), and therefore only reveals a false method of escape from it. It is, in any case, a fact which requires no particular argument, that a permanent union among the Churches cannot hope to issue from considerations merely sentimental, expedient or utilitarian. The Church will be required to discover reasons more profound and more compelling, if she is not to be allured into premature projects on behalf of schemes for union, from which no permanent good can possibly come, and through which the Church herself, in the end, will not be without danger of losing what prestige she now possesses in the eyes of the world, and in the esteem of her own membership.

It is quite possible, however, that some of you have been influenced by the prevailing sentiments on behalf of this alleged necessity for union, to which I have referred. As students in the critical atmosphere which is inevitable in a University, it may be that you have become disillusioned as to the value of many of those personal convictions regarding your own Church, and regarding Christianity in general, upon which you largely depended, when you set about to pursue the academic career which leads to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. Perhaps you find yourselves today in that rather distressing situation, in which, having committed yourselves to this particular clerical vocation, you are wondering if you will be obliged, thereby, to give your life's efforts to something which is merely a side-issue among those interests which are destined to claim the thought and activity of the alert and forward-looking religious people of the future. I believe something like this was in your minds when you asked me to speak to you on this subject; and it is

because of this fact that I have taken your request seriously, and feel under obligation to speak to your questionings with all sincerity.

I am aware that much of what I will be obliged to say may not meet with your approval, indeed, with your various specific personal needs, and above all, with your desires or prejudices. I am glad that you have asked me to speak on the subject, not from the usual abstract or purely academic point of view, but in a very "Personal" way. I take that to mean that you desire my *own specific reasons* for refusing to enter the union of Churches, which was consummated in Canada in 1925. I shall endeavour, so far as that is possible, to adhere to our desires in this respect, reminding you, at the same time, that such decisions, as men are obliged to make at the crucial periods of life, are never and should never be of a purely personal nature, in the sense that such may be dictated by mere personal interests, motives or inclinations.

It is, of course, impossible to treat this subject in any exhaustive way in a limited number of addresses. All I can hope to do is avail myself of the opportunity, which your specific request makes possible, to unveil some of those thoughts concerning this whole matter which have prevailed most forcibly with myself. It is always to be recognized that the very deepest reasons for one's convictions and actions are things very difficult to convey to other people. I ask you, therefore, to take into consideration the fact that the differences which may exist between you and me, in length of experience and in respective circumstances of our lives up till this time, may make such arguments as I use less pertinent to you than they have been to myself.

I am obliged to confess, first of all, that, during the whole period of controversy which preceded that important Assembly

in June, 1925, I could scarcely detect a single argument, either for or against organic union, which seemed to entail any particular *Christian* obligation to decide one way or another in the matter. Even now, I cannot remember one argument against proposed union, which in itself, sufficiently impressed me as to make it strictly a matter of conscience to remain in the Presbyterian Church. I do not say this boastfully, nor ironically, nor yet regretfully. I recognize that quite different arguments may appeal to different men who are equally sincere. But I am persuaded, especially as the years go by, that the whole controversy was waged too largely on a level to which, unfortunately, Church controversies often descend, and in which the essential issues are either ignored altogether, or overshadowed by others much less worthy. Moreover, I am convinced that religious life in our own Church, and indeed in Canada as a whole, is still today suffering immeasurably from that fact. Which side in the controversy was primarily and chiefly responsible for the deplorable spirit often displayed I will not venture to say. Presbyterians have doubtless had much reason to be incensed at many of the methods employed, and, at times, the highly disreputable propaganda apparently designed to mislead outsiders, or to intimidate unsuspecting people who desired to remain with their Church. I refer, for instance, to attempts continually made to play the Western over against the Eastern sections of the Church by implying that the West was really "stampeding the Church into union." The inference being that the failure of this union scheme would quite possibly endanger not only the existing ecclesiastical unity, but also the political unity of these two sections of the country. I happened to be a minister in Western Canada at that time, and the most prevalent attitude among the people there was certainly that of a rather

phlegmatic indifference to the whole matter — in itself an ominous sign for any true success of the cause of union. Had the Unionist leaders possessed a more intimate acquaintance with the rank and file of the Church in Eastern Canada, they would have discovered in that section of the country a similar condition. The diminishing interest on the part of the membership of the Church, distinctly revealed in the two successive votes which had been taken in the earlier period, apart from anything else, should have apprised these leaders of this significant fact.¹ At all events, it was definitely hinted to the Western people, in order, apparently, to stimulate an interest among them, which at no time could be said to be enthusiastic, that their friends in the East were growing weary of supplying funds for the maintenance of Western fields, which were, it was claimed, in many cases, quite unnecessary because of the outrageous over-lapping which was supposed to exist there.

I have in mind especially, however, the efforts made by reputable ministers to frighten people by the assertion that, by opposing union, they were resisting the Holy Spirit. How often in the history of the Church has the Holy Spirit been made to bear the burden of man's own ill-advised, though well-intentioned, schemes, his ambitions, and even the resulting tragedies. The reiterated pleading based upon a single three-fold text in St. John's Gospel, namely, "that they may be one, as we are" (17:11, 21, 22), used with a view to convincing the people that it was God's specific command that these Churches in Canada should be united, is a particular example

¹ Perhaps the more remarkable fact about these respective votes is to be perceived when we consider that neither vote represented more than a fraction of the total membership of the Church at the time.

of the questionable methods employed at that time. Surely, if this were the true interpretation of that text, it constitutes a dismal commentary on the Church's real history even from its New Testament beginnings. Long before St. John's Gospel was in existence, there were apparently, in those various sections which are being recognized today as constituting the Early Church, many wholesome differences of opinion respecting certain external ecclesiastical forms and requirements. The obvious truth is that these words as used by the Apostle had no reference whatever to matters which were under dispute in Canada, nor to mere ecclesiastical differences of any kind. Scholars are well aware that there have been grave doubts as to whether this particular prayer of Jesus, in which the aforementioned verses are embodied, together with many similar passages in this Gospel, are to be attributed directly to Jesus Himself. St. John's Gospel is not primarily a historic record of the life of Jesus; it is rather an interpretation of that life and of the experience of the Church. And manifestly, it is, in part, a polemic against incipient Gnostic heresies which had become a divisive factor in the Church at the end of the first century. Accordingly, the sentiment concerning unity expressed in these verses is directed, not toward any ecclesiastical differences which undoubtedly existed at the time, but rather, constitutes an appeal against a pseudo-philosophy which was undermining the traditional theological beliefs, or rather, of the Church. It was about matters of faith and theology that the Early Church was chiefly concerned at the time.

If, however, we prefer to accept these words as literally those of Jesus, they could only refer to that profound *unity in the Spirit* which was the only unity known to, and determinative in, the Early Church. The "Fellowship of the Spirit"

alone constituted a religious community, a Church of Christ, in that age.

Unfortunately, however, for the Unionist argument, its advocates put little stress upon either of the above considerations, namely, the character of belief or theology, or the necessity for spiritual oneness in Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is, therefore, inconceivable that our Lord should desire, in this or any day, a union of Churches in which such profound matters as faith, doctrine, and Christian experience are not considered the paramount issues at stake. The palpable hollowness of such a type of pleading on the part of prominent Unionists, together with the almost ridiculous seriousness with which certain of them seemed to be taking themselves at the time, more than any counter arguments which anti-union leaders brought against them, made some of us, at least, wonder about the whole business.

These Unionist leaders, moreover, were not averse to appealing to Caesar, and Caesar served them well so far as their immediate interests were concerned. I say this, though I believe, contrary to the opinion of many worthy leaders in the Presbyterian Church, that in a true sense, the Unionist party, by their recognized overwhelming majority in the Assembly, had ecclesiastical law on their side. I hold, however, that they used that right, and the privilege which was theirs because of it, to bring a proposal before the Parliament of this country which was designed to pervert the basic principle of Presbyterianism, if indeed, it did not violate a fundamental principle of Christianity itself. In the later days of the struggle, when it was apparently believed by Unionist leaders that the object of their long endeavours must be attained at all cost, methods were used, which perhaps under other circumstances would not have been considered just, even on behalf of so great a

cause as they conceived theirs to be. Sober judgment in the future will in all probability declare against the wisdom of the policy pursued at that time. There are always greater interests than those served either by ecclesiastical right or law, or by those peculiar necessities of a particular time, which continually come up to perplex men, and which, in this instance, were largely conditioned by certain immediate practical problems which undoubtedly existed.

On the other hand, in fairness, I think we must acknowledge that there was much on our side which must have greatly incensed the more sincere among those who conscientiously believed in the necessity for union. There was undoubtedly much ignorant bigotry and factional prejudice displayed, which was of a nature to depreciate the cause of Presbyterianism even in the eyes of those who were outside the struggle altogether. There was also substantial ground for the Unionists' charge of a blatant hypocrisy, on the part of some, in their claim for a particular devotion and loyalty to the Presbyterian Church, of which they had never before given the slightest evidence. Moreover, Presbyterians did not always forbear meeting Caesar with Caesar. When, indeed, we have observed the sectional, and manifold selfish tendencies which have confessedly characterized our Church life since 1925, we do well to consider if it can in any way be conscientiously affirmed that the spirit which often animated our course in the beginning, and throughout the struggle, was one above reproach. I am sure that the impression has been forced upon many of you younger men, during the passage of these recent years, that many who at that time sought "to preserve the Presbyterian Church" in Canada, must have been interested in a mere cause, rather than in the truth concerning that cause.

But it is not of such matters that I wish to speak to you. It is the opinion of many, in both Churches, that both the United Church and the Presbyterian Church might now very well overlook and entirely forget about such things. I have mentioned them merely to reveal something of that spirit which, unfortunately, possessed the minds of men, and very often blinded them to the deeper issues involved. I firmly believe there was taking place at the time, although few were at all conscious of it, a far more profound struggle, namely, *one primarily between different religious principles*. This is becoming more evident in view of the presence in the world today of religious movements far more radical and challenging than that which vexed us ten years ago, or during any period of the years preceding. To this aspect of our subject, however, we shall give more definite consideration later.

I must, in the meantime, give serious consideration to some of the arguments, which were advanced, but which, in my judgment, were not of sufficient value to warrant those who call themselves Presbyterians remaining with their Church, when there had been offered to them an opportunity to enter into a larger fellowship with other peoples — peoples who, like themselves, had amply proven by their history to be both Christian and Protestant in their religious faith.

Part One

**INSUFFICIENT REASONS
FOR REJECTING THE UNION
PROPOSALS**

Chapter 1

DENOMINATIONALISM AND ECCLESIASTICISM

DENOMINATIONALISM

It has very often been assumed that, having been born and nurtured in the Presbyterian Church, it is something like a moral or religious duty to die in it. This, or something akin to it, has been put forward as a reason for refusing to be identified with the Union movement which culminated in the partial success attained in 1925. When made in a serious way, and not from purely unenlightened or perverse prejudice, this claim seems to imply the conviction that there is something not only sacred, but also something absolute and final about the Presbyterian Church, its traditions, and its form and spirit of worship. It represents one form which a pure *Denominationalism* sometimes assumes. And naturally enough, due to the bitter polemical disputations in which the Presbyterian Church has been involved during the last two decades or more, the impression is abroad, whether we contemplate the fact with pleasure or not, that Presbyterians, of all peoples, are bigoted and peculiarly partisan in this respect.

One can fully appreciate and admire all true sentiments of religious men, which have as their basis a loyalty to that Church which has proved to be both the mother and the nurse

of such Christian faith as they happen to possess. One also understands the very great importance that must be attached to well-grounded traditions in the life of any Church. Without true traditions, it is obvious that a religious body cannot belong to the historic Church of Jesus Christ. The United Church of Canada has suffered and will undoubtedly suffer in the future, not particularly from the fact that it is, as some unjustly claim, in reality without traditions, but because the traditions it possesses are of a heterogeneous character, the different strands of which are probably not so vitally merged into one another as it is supposed, and hoped, by that Church. Tradition, when rightly understood, is a term significant with profoundly *religious* meaning. It does not primarily bear tribute to the mere historical externalism of a Church; but rather to a Church's peculiar and original *witness to Christ*, to the particular religious atmosphere engendered thereby, and to the corresponding resultant distinctive attitude which it assumes to life as a whole. It is owing to these positive and original characteristics, that it has always been found difficult to unite, in any permanent way, different traditions, especially if these have been of long standing. It is so even when such traditions appear to have been long dormant, and to have become thoroughly inert and completely inactive. Supposedly moribund traditions have a habit of coming to life unexpectedly, and when least wanted. In fact, the various characteristic Church traditions can never be truly blended, except on the occasion of a wider movement of life, and one which, if it is to be effective in freeing men from ecclesiastical biases, must primarily and essentially be of a deeply religious character; that is, one which produces a positive, powerful resurgence of faith, the result of a new-born experience of Christ in His redemptive work. Even then the older traditions

do not become completely submerged, but find rather a new significance in this deeper unity of faith and Christian life.

This positive *religious* characteristic, however, was just the feature which was conspicuous by its absence from the whole Union movement as it progressed towards its climax in Canada. It is always a mistake to assume that some new outlook upon life which happens to represent the passing mood of a particular period, or some new emphases in the matters which are thought, often mistakenly, to concern religion fundamentally, or, indeed, some very practical perplexities demanding so-called "new ventures of faith," are in themselves likely to supply the basis for a suitable substitute for those deeper historical and traditional witnesses to Christ which I have mentioned above. It is a mistake to believe that any new amalgam of ideas, except when based upon positive Christian experience, can erase the older traditions. One feels that a great deal of the Union sentiment which has found expression in modern times is the direct result of a modernistic outlook upon life, which is not essentially Christian. This has made less sure men's distinctive sensitiveness to those peculiar attitudes of faith which originally gave rise to the various Churches and which, each in its own way, constituted a distinctive feature of essential Christianity.

At the same time, this recognition of the profound value of traditions should by no means cause us to believe that such traditions constitute, at any given time, the all-decisive factors in determining a Church's actions in regard to its course, or future destiny. Unfortunately, in certain Churches, tradition – as understood in a more external sense than that employed here – seems to have become all powerful and all determinative. Unfortunately, too, in the case of the Presbyterian Church, in the course of the Union controversy, many who

used the argument under consideration, as their reason for refusing to enter the Union, gave such claims as we have advanced on behalf of tradition no such serious consideration at all. When such people did not treat the whole matter lightly, there was often (though this was by no means generally, among Presbyterians) in their attitude much that can be called by no better name than sheer prejudice and bigotry. Perhaps they were, at times, influenced by no greater motive than a desire to be left undisturbed.

It must be admitted, and without question, that there are conceivable circumstances which may arise in the life of a Church, which would make it obligatory for that Church to recognize that its own peculiar witness to Christ would henceforth be vital and valid, only in so far as it acknowledged and found itself merged in a more complete witness to His redeeming and saving power. But, when such larger witness is forthcoming, the members of the Church interested will be vividly conscious of it and will be under the irresistible compulsion and constraint which it places upon them. Besides, it is particularly necessary to observe that the particular "witness" which is really basal to Presbyterianism is perhaps one more suited to such forward movements in the Spirit, than is any other among Christian Churches. The early Reformed Church recognized itself, in an especial way, as a movement forward toward a fuller witness to God in Christ. In its earliest awakening, it conceived itself less bound by the traditional or credal ties of the past than did any other Church of that time. And never for a moment did it presume to think that the end of things, religious, theological or spiritual, lay with itself. It is strange, as Karl Barth has in effect said, that Reformed Churchmen have so far forgotten what they essentially stand for, as to have ignored almost entirely this characteristic and

all-significant feature of their Churches' original position. The truth is, that a pseudo-scholastic interpretation of the original belief and doctrine of the Reformed Church has, for almost three centuries, blinded Reformed Churchmen themselves to the real significance of the fountain springs of that inspiration which gave the Church and its doctrine historic existence. And if this be true in a general way, I claim it has been lamentably true, within certain circles, in the Presbyterian Church of Canada since 1925.

Moreover, it can be truly said that no Church has been more Catholic in outlook and practice than the Presbyterian Church, when it has not been perversely untrue to its essential nature. But unfortunately, it has not infrequently been that very thing. Far more Catholic is it, indeed, than the Roman Catholic Church itself, which has dared to monopolize that term of significant connotation, while giving it, at the same time, a specifically limited meaning to suit its own ecclesiastical purposes and presumptions. Furthermore, it is to be remembered that the Presbyterian Church has a definite history; in my opinion, a history (when we think of it specifically as Church) of not more than four hundred years duration. I am aware that there are Presbyterians today, who, in Anglican fashion, would carry their Church's history back behind the Reformation of the sixteenth century, particularly through the ancient Celtic Church to the early centuries, and would find indeed, a full-fledged Presbyterianism in the primitive Church itself. I am not, I may say, of this persuasion. The importance which such claims have for our subject may be left for a later consideration, in which these and other kindred claims will come up more properly.

Suffice it to say here that *Presbyterianism*, when regarded, first, merely as a group or system of religious attitudes or

principles, either in their cruder or more developed forms, is no more than an historical and temporal expression of Christianity, as this Christianity, in the course of its history, was compelled to find expression and take intellectual or ecclesiastical form in consonance with the human conditions of this life. It is not eternal, therefore, in the sense that Christian revelation itself is eternal. The *Presbyterian Church*, when regarded, secondly, strictly as an organized communion, had a *beginning*, which can be definitely dated. Accordingly, it is at least conceivable that in the future purposes of God even this Presbyterian Church, which so many, for centuries, have devoutly loved and admired might indeed have an *end*. We may therefore perceive that the argument at the beginning of this section is one, scarcely warranted, as an adequate argument against Union.

ECCLESIASTICISM

There has been among us a widely-prevailing antipathy to Church Union due to a belief which, in its essence, is not unlike that just treated, but which nevertheless, in its specific emphasis, is sufficiently different to demand particular consideration.

The emphasis referred to is one more clearly of an ecclesiastical character. Certain devoted and very loyal Presbyterians seem to be under the impression that Presbyterianism, somehow, is to be identified in a peculiar way with Christianity itself. Were those, who are of this particular mind, asked for reasons concerning their conviction in this regard, the greater number would doubtless call attention to such matters as the heroic struggles for religious liberty which have, in an especial way, distinguished the history of their own Church,

the simplicity of its worship and the democratic character of its government, the purity of its doctrine and the evangelical nature of its gospel; all of which, they would maintain, have been in strict accord with the spirit, the thought and the motives which animated the Early Church. If, however, such considerations alone were those involved in the above conviction, it would be a matter quite easy to deal with. One would need only to point out that, although there is much in these contentions which undoubtedly distinguishes the Reformed Church, yet there are undoubtedly other Churches which, in respect to some of the qualifications mentioned, could lay claim to equal consideration. The truth is that most people, unacquainted with the history of their neighbours' faith, are prone to over-estimate the virtues of their own particular denomination and to depreciate those of others. Besides, it is a fact, not so generally discerned as it should be, that the Presbyterian Church can never be considered as essentially democratic, either in its character or in its basic principle, according to any popular acceptance of that term. Often, too, the spirit of its faith has been startlingly Judaistic, rather than Christian or evangelic in character. Nor can it be said that the Presbyterian Church, especially in Scotland in the early days of its ascendancy there, has in any consistent way stood for liberty of conscience. Very often, unfortunately, its history in that country has been unmistakably marked by a callous disregard of this religious principle, when applied to outsiders. Of course, the blame to be attached, in this respect, is greatly mitigated by the fact that such intolerance as existed was very often a result of fear, as Principal Oman has contended in regard to Protestant intolerance in general.

There is, however, a more definitely considered argument, emanating from better informed circles, which implies

that Presbyterianism is in a particular way the truest, if not the only expression of Christianity. This contention is of great importance and requires serious consideration. It is an argument which rests finally upon an ecclesiastical basis; upon the question of what essentially constitutes a religious community, a Church of Jesus Christ. And, we may point out at once, that, as an argument for any distinctive claim which may be made on behalf of Presbyterianism, it can only be conceded as valid if Presbyterianism is to be considered primarily as an *Ecclesiasticism*, and indeed as the only true Ecclesiasticism.

There are great and powerful Churches, as you know, which, in the course of their history, have consistently taken precisely this position, namely, that a true Church of Christ is to be recognized particularly by its ecclesiastical constitutive principle. The emphasis in such instances is placed, for the most part, upon such matters as a 'regular' ministry, 'true' orders, a 'legitimate' administration of the sacraments, and, consequently, the necessity for a legitimate and 'unbroken succession.' The Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches, for example, have considered this necessary constitutive principle to reside in the Bishop, or in the divinely authorized order of the episcopacy. Within Presbyterianism, for some years past (particularly is this true in certain sections of the Church of Scotland), there has been an increasingly strong tendency to differentiate that which constitutes a Church, in a manner quite similar to that of the Churches just mentioned, only in this case the constitutive principle is held to inhere in the Presbyter, or in the corresponding order of the Presbytery. Curiously enough, since the disruption of the Church in 1925, and even before that time, there has been a distinct tendency of a similar kind within Presbyterianism in Canada, the inspiration of which, doubtless, emanates from the sources just

referred to. I speak of this, as a curious matter, since the preponderating spirit of Canadian Presbyterianism during its entire history has been that of increasing freedom from any meticulous ecclesiastical emphases, or from any particularized claims for sanctity, privilege or authority.

It reveals an interesting phase of the irony of history to recognize the fact that the Anglican Church itself actually received its first impulse to make special claim for the divine authority of its particular form of Church government, through the necessity, in early Reformation days in England, of defending its institutional system against a recalcitrant and dogmatic Presbyterian Puritanism which, at the time, existed within its own borders, and which claimed for the Presbyterian system absolute scriptural sanction and divine authority. And although Presbyterianism, as a whole, from those earlier times till comparatively recent years, has placed very little emphasis on such matters, such claims have become normative and regulative for our Anglican brethren. It has always appeared to me that any undue emphasis upon ecclesiastical privileges or prerogatives, or, for that matter, upon a rigid dogmatism in respect of those "things to be believed," in any of the various realms of religious activity or thought, is indicative of a devitalized faith and a decaying discernment of what a Christian Church essentially is. One not infrequently receives the impression from those ministers or clergymen who persist in harping on such strings that they have concluded that the Christian evangel in itself has not proven sufficient to elicit that respect, allegiance and loyalty to the Church of Christ, which is her due. But, more especially, it would seem that these men have not found the exercise of their own ministry in that evangel sufficient to guarantee to themselves that respectful regard and authority over men's

lives, which they so much covet and claim as their peculiar right, but which does not seem to have come to them, as it undoubtedly has to others, in the ordinary course of their ministerial work.

It is true that the early Reformers earnestly and conscientiously strove to build the Church reformed (i.e., in those things which pertain to its external requirements) upon what they deemed, at the time, to be lines definitely set forth in, and sanctioned by, the New Testament. Could they have had access to that greatly increased and discriminating knowledge concerning the Early Church which, through the labours of modern scholarship, is in the possession of men of today, they doubtless would have been less dogmatic. Indeed, the fearless and wholly sincere desire for truth, which, for the most part, distinguished their efforts at the time, would have caused them to accept the situation as it was actually to be found in the New Testament, and would have determined their ecclesiastical views in accordance with it. As it was, their spiritual instincts led them, on the whole, in the right direction. Although obviously in error in regard to certain details and dogmatic inferences based upon such, and quite without warrant, in attaching the importance some of them did to those outer forms and expressions which Christianity has taken, whether in the primitive Church or that of the sixteenth century, they nevertheless truly discerned the governing principle of early Christian life. There are today no forms of ecclesiastical government which in any definite way correspond to that which was obtained in the Apostolic age. The "modern" Churchman, Canon Streeter, candidly admits that there were in embryo three forms of government in that early Church, namely, the Presbyterian, the Congregational, and the Episcopal; but he maintains, at the same time, that the

true and natural development was ever toward that form of Episcopacy which, in the course of time, actually became normative and permanent. The truth is, if we approach the data without preconceived ideas, that the Presbyterian principle would seem to have been more fundamental and more wide-spread in the very early days than either of the others, while, with increasing momentum from the beginning of the second century, episcopal government, because of various adverse external and internal circumstances, became more and more dominant.

The tendency among these Presbyterians to whom special reference has been made would at present appear to be one in which less dependence is to be placed upon Reformation authorities than heretofore, in order to vindicate those special ecclesiastical claims which they would advance on behalf of the Presbyterian Church. They seek a lineage from the earliest times which is more direct and perhaps, in their minds, more secure than that afforded by the Reformation itself. For Scotland, according to some, it would even seem that the importance of the Reformation consisted chiefly in the fact that it proved an instrument in restoring that which had originally been. One sometimes wonders if, in their zeal for an ecclesiastical pedigree of this kind, ecclesiastical Presbyterians may not yet find themselves justified in repudiating their Protestant origins, as for slightly different reasons, has been done by a large and influential section of the Church of England. At any rate, a serious effort has been made to prove the character of the original Scoto-Irish Celtic Church as strictly Presbyterian, and, as a Church, always quite independent of Rome and especially of the Papacy. It is implied that, except for a period extending from Queen Margaret to the end of the reign of James V, when the Celtic Church was suppressed by

a Roman ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Scotland, although its spirit and influence were by no means obliterated at the time, Scottish Christianity has always been Presbyterian rather than Episcopal in character. Unfortunately, however, for such a view of things, a large part of the documentary evidence seems to be decidedly against it. As a recent Roman Catholic writer, John Ritchie, has perhaps too bluntly put it: "Not so long ago even educated Scotsmen fondly believed that the early Christianity of their country was restored to them by Knox. The notion is still held by a few fanatics; but it has been wholly abandoned by accredited historians on evidence clear as noonday."

It is true, however, that there was a vital difference between the ancient Celtic Church and the then existing Roman Catholic Church. But that difference did not consist in any radical difference in constitution, nor in any independence of the authority of Rome, or of the Papacy, which was at all exceptional at that time. Nor was it in the fact that the Celtic Church had its roots somewhere other than in Rome, or, perhaps, more directly in the Church of Gaul, which was itself essentially Roman both in tradition and allegiance. The real difference between the Celtic and Roman Churches lay in the fact that, for some reason or other, the former apparently possessed a more truly evangelical spirit and teaching than the latter, and had, above all, learned that love and truth alone constituted those weapons which can be legitimately used in a Christian warfare, in a manner that the Roman Church has never done. The respective attitudes of Colman on the one hand and Wilfrid on the other at the Council of Whitby in 664 were significant of the motives which animated the two Churches represented there, not only at that time, but during the whole preceding period. But, unfortunately, these are the

very things which are never of great interest to ecclesiastics, and Scottish ecclesiastics are no exception to this rule. In fact, it is not in such specifically religious matters, according to super-refined ecclesiastical judgment, that we must look for those things which finally constitute a Church as such.

It has been necessary to dwell on this aspect of my subject at some length, if for no other reason than to reveal how seemingly useless is any attempt to substantiate the validity of a Church upon purely ecclesiastical grounds, or by its ecclesiastical credentials. Any effort made either by Anglicanism or by Presbyterianism to trace a true lineage wholly apart from the development of the Papacy – that is, apart from the Roman continuity – is futile. The Roman historian has all the best of it in such controversies. Not that I consider ecclesiastical matters without value, or without real religious significance; nor that I deny to either Anglicanism or Presbyterianism real and important claims in this respect. Forms and Orders indeed have far greater significance for the Church than many so-called evangelical and nonecclesiastical Churches usually attribute to them; but this is not a matter which is our particular concern in this treatise. It is sufficient to maintain that these are never of first-rate importance – they never reveal the original and constitutive principle of a Church. That constitutive principle is to be discovered, in its fundamental aspect, in that experienced spiritual union or fellowship which exists between Christ and His people as a whole, and in which the Grace of God is evidently manifested. As that outstanding Cambridge Presbyterian historian, Professor Carnegie Simpson, has put it: “It is this solidarity between Christ and His people which is the creative and constitutive, the originating and essential principle in the being and life of the Church.” It is this Grace of God manifested,

which makes it possible to *recognize* a Church; or, as Professor Simpson further explains, "We must therefore maintain that recognition should fasten, primarily, on this (referring to the Grace which was of God, as exhibited in the original Gentile Antiochean Church, and as discovered there by Barnabas and Paul, Acts 11:23), which was then and is still the constitutive thing about a Church, and only secondarily and subordinately on those external things which express its ecclesiastical order." The constitutive principle of a Church is *spiritual*; and these ecclesiastical things which "furnish and organize a Church" cannot, without challenge, claim to be primarily of that order.

It is to this principle alone, therefore, deeply imbedded as it was in the life of the original Church of Christ, that Presbyterians may lay claim, as one which symbolizes their own historic experience in and since Reformation times. And it is an experience to which the Presbyterian form of ecclesiastical government, based as it is strictly on the priesthood of all believers, and given operation and representation in the office of the Presbyter, through Presbyteries, Synods, and Assemblies, can fairly be said to give an expression as effective as any other known among the Churches. This, I believe, must be widely acknowledged, even though Presbyterian systems are often so grotesquely abused and so ineffectively operated that the genius of that system has seldom been permitted to reveal itself at its best.

But this claim is surely not such as to warrant any particular antipathy to the idea of union among the Churches — not such certainly as to estimate any proposal for union, as unfortunately has been done by some, as a "criminal thing." This recognition of that which is primarily the constitutive factor of a Church's life reveals, on the contrary, the one possibility

of Union, and the road along which it is likely to be attained, if attained at all. Adverse forces and influences of another character altogether, particularly the absence of just those spiritual, and therefore doctrinal, elements which are origina-
tive in all great religious movements, constitute the considerations which have made much of the sentiment for union, in our day, a thing which, in my opinion, could not be taken very seriously.

Meantime, we of the Presbyterian Church must first learn to know what is at the bottom of our own Presbyterian faith, and, after that, consider the beliefs and present tendencies of belief of other bodies of Christians in the light of this one essential thing. There is exhibited at times a kind of Presbyterianism of which no Presbyterian can ever afford to be proud, that, namely, which is either ignorantly presumptuous, or that which is content to be merely sectarian. We do our Church no justice when we appear to outsiders almost as provincial and as noisy as any common rookery. We could very well desist, for a while at least, from using on every possible occasion that well-abused hymn, "Faith of our fathers, living still," when we know, as well as we know our own souls, that our present faith has very little of that insight into things spiritual, of that courage which deemed no sacrifice too great, and most of all, of that contempt for things which do not matter, which undoubtedly is referred to in that hymn.

Chapter 2

RATIONAL ORTHODOXY

There is still another reason which has been advanced as one which made it impossible for Presbyterians to enter into this union of Churches in Canada. It is a reason which, at the height of the union controversy, was shamefully exploited by Unionist enthusiasts with a view to ridiculing and discrediting the whole character of that opposition which they were so unexpectedly encountering. Not only in Canada, but, it would seem, in other countries as well, especially in Scotland, was it broadcast, often by a type of propaganda in the face of which the more or less unorganized opposition was helpless, and would indeed have been ill-advised to attempt to emulate or to meet, namely, that the opposition to Church Union in Canada was very largely represented by that section of the original Presbyterian Church which was obscurantist in theology, ultra-conservative and even "fundamentalist" in its views concerning religion and Scripture.

It is true that, toward the end of the Union controversy, a comparatively insignificant number of those adhering to the Presbyterian Church, and who possessed just such views of Scripture and Theology, took advantage of the wanton repudiation of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the part of certain strong Union advocates to become very active, particularly in the press, in the cause which they especially

espoused. The desire, doubtless, was to align the Presbyterian Church with this particular type of thinking. And, as a matter of fact, the continuing Presbyterian Assembly of 1925 did pass a resolution enthusiastically reaffirming a very strict adherence to the recognized Standards of the Church. The interpretation put upon that action by Unionists generally, by not a few Presbyterians in Canada, and by prominent Presbyterian leaders in other lands, was to the effect that those Presbyterians, who were determined to remain in their Presbyterian faith in Canada, had resolved to give henceforth an unreserved and almost servile adherence to the subordinate Standards, and had thus, as a well-known Presbyterian scholar in England is reported to have said, managed to "turn their clock back fifty years." The success, however, of that resolution in the Assembly at the time was chiefly due to two causes, namely, 1) opportunity had not been given for any discussion of the question, nor had a regular ballot been taken, since everybody present, whether a commissioner or not, was allowed to vote, 2) and more specially, this enthusiastic and almost unanimous decision was the outcome of a pained and incensed feeling which had grown up during the preceding months. This was due to the fact that certain ministers favouring Union, who, in their ordination vows, had pledged themselves to be governed by Presbyterian standards and doctrines, had in public meetings and in the press brazenly repudiated these; had confessed, in fact, that they had never really believed in them or taken them seriously, and, in some cases, I believe, boasted that they had never read them through. Nothing perhaps in the religious life of Canada has had the effect of so discrediting ministers of the Church in the eyes of laymen as this inexcusable exhibition of bravado and insincerity.

Accordingly, the success of the above resolution was largely due to a feeling of resentment, justifiable in the circumstances, against a ministry which, it was commonly said, had really betrayed its people. At the same time, we believe that the passing of that resolution was most unfortunate from any angle we care to consider it, and particularly for the continuing Presbyterian Church. Not only did it give a completely false impression of the composition of Presbyterianism in Canada (except in restricted areas in a few cities, constituting in all only a fraction of the Presbyterian people, there has never been, nor is there today, any extreme reactionary element in Presbyterianism in Canada), it also failed to take account of the fact, so obvious, namely, that matters so delicate and so important as a Church's beliefs can never receive satisfactory treatment in an atmosphere of passion, and by an assemblage of people, the great proportion of whom had never really given a moment's thought to the grave difficulties involved in such matters.

Since, however, the respective doctrinal positions of the Presbyterian and United Churches will require to come up for special consideration in a later section, and will be viewed there from the larger perspective of the positive necessity for a doctrinal emphasis in the life of a Church, we need only be reminded here why this particular view, adopted by a few extremists, and mistakenly assumed by others, to be that which is to be regarded as orthodox in respect to doctrine, did not at the time constitute a sufficient reason to justify Presbyterians' refusing to enter into union with other Churches. It is necessary to recognize, in this regard, the following facts about Presbyterian doctrine and especially about the particular Confession of Faith to which we, as Canadian Presbyterians, adhere.

FIRST: We must note that, although doctrine is of the utmost importance in the constitution, and absolutely necessary for the spiritual life of a Church, the mere intellectual assent to doctrines of faith, even when these are true doctrines, is not necessarily to be identified with what is known as possessing faith in Christ. There is a kind of rational orthodoxy and a demand for absolute loyalty to the letter of Scripture, the residue of seventeenth and eighteenth century rationalism, or, more properly, of the characteristic rationalistic apologetic of that time, which can in no wise be identified with the faith-attitude and theological understanding of the original Reformed Church. That Church, as already stated, with purposeful conviction put less emphasis upon the acceptance of the historic Creeds, attached less significance to contemporaneous Confessions, than any other Church of Reformation times. Moreover, in consideration of their distinctive interpretation of what the *Word of God* signified – many claims to the contrary – they did not, at first, mean to identify that *Word* with the mere letter of Scripture. It was Scholasticism, the arid aftermath of the Reformation, and not the Reformation proper, which succeeded in imposing this rationalistic view of faith and this uninspired and sterile conception of Scripture upon Protestants.

SECOND: It was the truly *distinguishing* feature of that particular Presbyterianism from which we as a Church have originally sprung, that it had been compelled to consider all Confessions and all Standards alike, as strictly *subordinate* to Holy Scripture, that is, to *the* Word of God itself. We do well to remember in this connection, that there are many Presbyterian Confessions of Faith, certain of which, in my judgment, are decidedly superior in spiritual insight and scriptural understanding to the Westminster Confession of Faith. I,

myself, have always had a preference for the Heidelberg Catechism, or even for what is known as John Knox's Confession which, as you know, constituted the unofficial confessional of Presbyterian Scotland for upward of a hundred years after 1560. We must beware lest we become provincial in our Presbyterianism. England, Scotland and Ireland have had no monopoly of that form of faith. The Presbyterian is always to be considered as a great Catholic Church, and many of its various branches, although remaining loyal to their original Confessions, have found it convenient and necessary, at different times, either to modify the rigid nature of the subscription required, or to delete certain manifest erroneous statements of detail to be found in the Confessions themselves. The Westminster Confession had become somewhat of a problem in the Church of Scotland at a very early period. The United Presbyterian and the Free Churches of Scotland were, however, the first to make certain modifications in the attitude required to be assumed to this subordinate Standard. The Irish Presbyterian Church, I believe, has taken something of the same course, and the Northern Presbyterian Church of the United States has considered and dealt with its Confession in a like manner. Even our own Canadian Presbyterian Church many years ago recognized that certain injunctions embodied in the Westminster Confession and concerned with the relation of State to Church could have no possible pertinence to the conditions existing in a country like Canada. Accordingly, it will be seen that the matter of defining the position which Canadian Presbyterians should assume to their subordinate Standards was one which might well have been left in abeyance; and no one with a real insight into the true significance of faith and of doctrine could have been justified on the particular ground which I have described above, in making

that a deciding factor against the Union proposals. I say this, even when I believe that there is to be found in this very matter one of the most profound reasons why there were two distinctly different opinions in this country toward the union of these three Churches, and when I believe, moreover, that such opinions constituted, in reality, the fundamental cause of the division which eventually took place. But in the consideration of this fact we must be careful to define what we mean, and especially what we do *not* mean, in respect to that which constitutes true faith and true doctrine. This consideration, however, must also be left to a later point in the treatment of my subject.

Let me say, in the meantime, that no one today has succeeded in putting the Reformed Church position concerning its doctrine and faith more clearly than Karl Barth; and, for that reason, I shall conclude what I have had to say concerning inadequate reasons for opposing Union with a pertinent quotation from his writings, in special reference to the Reformed Church's *scriptural principle* and to its particular conception of *doctrine*:

"...What one may be moved to say concerning God, the world, and man, because he must say it, having let the Scripture speak to him-the Scriptures themselves, and not the Scriptures interpreted by any particular tradition; the whole Scriptures, not a part of them to suit a preconceived theory; the Scriptures, and not the utterances of pious men of the past or present which might be confused with them; the Scriptures, and not without the significant word of the Spirit which sustains them – what, after those Scriptures have spoken to him, one may be moved to say in fear and trembling concerning the things about which man of himself may say nothing, or

only foolishness, *that*, if we may judge from our beginnings, is Reformed doctrine. *Doctrina* is the word of the Christian man at crisis with the word of God: it is penetrated by that merciless purifying and cleansing which is witnessed to in the Scriptures. It remains the word of man. It does not itself become the *verbum divinum*, but in this relation it is none the less a legitimate and pure *praedicatio verbi divini*."

Perhaps nothing has ever been said concerning faith and doctrine which is so designed to challenge all perverted conceptions of the same. There is no room here for a mere *orthodoxy* or for mere *verbal inspiration* theories concerning Scripture, nor indeed for that superficial disparagement of Creeds and superficial views of Scripture which have characterized Christian thought in Canada for a generation, and undoubtedly have made it easy for many to believe that there were no longer any differences in the several Churches' witnesses to Christ.

I am persuaded that Barth has given, in the above quotation, what was essentially the Reformed Church's position in the matter; and, I ask, what position in any Church reveals a more discerning and spiritually penetrating understanding of it? Presbyterians must learn to perceive that it is never within man's power to *compel* men's beliefs. No man has ever succeeded in doing this. No man has succeeded in *making* himself believe that which he verily thought he ought to believe. I speak feelingly, because I have tried it out. Indeed, it is irreligious to attempt to do so, either on your own behalf or on behalf of others, and such a procedure always results in a perversion of true faith. Belief is originally and fundamentally an outcome of an experience, of long or short duration, in which man is *apprehended* by God through God's ever-living Word

as this Word speaks to him through Scripture, through the medium of the Church or more especially through the preaching of the Word, as Barth claims. And doctrine, in every approach we make to it, must ever be conceived in the light of that fact alone. This is the essential Presbyterian attitude to doctrine and to faith, that is, if Presbyterianism is to be considered the true offspring of the early Reformed Church.

There is surely an inexcusable confusion in the minds of many Christian people between two very different things, namely, the necessity, on the one hand, of a true doctrinal basis for vital Christian faith, and therefore, for Christianity itself, and, on the other hand, a certain doctrinaire attitude to religion in which doctrine is held to be a necessity, in the sense of its being a certain defined *quantum* to be *believed*, even when not supported by any concrete personal insight into its spiritual significance, on the part of the believer. Those who have been at pains to trace the origins of, that is, the circumstances which gave rise to, the great Christian Creeds and Confessions, have doubtless been impressed with the fact that the authors of the same have been men, constrained and compelled by their faith and experience in Christ to say what they did say, even in opposition to the recognized contemporaneous philosophies, and at times in face of a perplexing paradox of thought in their own minds, which could in no wise be rationally or logically synthesized. True theology has never permitted itself to be conditioned by philosophy, by sheer logic, nor by the passing mood, spirit or outlook, of any particular age.

It is just as true, however, that the original framers of our great Creeds could never have contemplated for a moment that such statements of faith as they were obliged to make, would be interpreted in such a way as to bind or to obviate the

necessity for living faith and the true spirit of enquiry. They did not presume to encompass, to absolutely measure and rigidly define God and His ways with men. They were too sensitive to the inscrutable and incomprehensible nature of God, to the infinite mystery of His revelation and relations to man through Christ, even to claim that such expressions concerning these, as mere man might be impelled to make, could be adequate to describe them. And yet, they would have contended, these expressions of faith by man were absolutely necessary for Christian faith and for the Christian Church, indeed for salvation. Creeds were not designed to shackle the thought of man concerning God. Rather, were they designed to reveal the thought of God concerning man. Christian Creeds are the necessary sign-posts on the *Christian* way to God. Without them there is no Christianity. Like windows in a dark room they serve as those apertures through which man must look if he is to see at all the liberating spaces that lie beyond.

Part Two

PERSONAL REASONS FOR REFUSING TO ENTER THE PROPOSED UNION

Chapter 3

A CHALLENGING FACT

I am now in a better position to deal with that particular aspect of my subject, which calls for those more personal reasons why I did not find myself constrained to enter this newly-constituted Church in Canada. This, of course, is the more difficult part of my task; and were it not that your request has been urgent in this respect, I should scarcely venture to state these reasons. I have, however, been hoping, from what I have already said about inadequate reasons for rejecting the Union proposals, that you yourselves have inferred some of those things which have weighed most strongly with me, and which really made it necessary for me to remain in the Presbyterian Church. I confess I did not find it the easy matter to come to a decision, which seems to have been the case with some; for, apart from the fact that many of my oldest, most esteemed and staunchest friends were compelled to make the opposite choice, I had a genuine sympathy with the aims and motives of many of those sincere people who, at the time, verily believed the union of the Churches to be imperative for the truest and best interests of religious life in Canada. I, at that time, was convinced that their views were mistaken ones, based upon considerations and necessities of a far too narrow and local character, and relying too supinely, perhaps, upon representations of the existing situation and its

needs, as portrayed by those whom they considered as the "prominent" men of the Church, and who, for that reason, they were persuaded, ought to know what was in its best interests. In the years subsequent to that time, I may say, I have not had the slightest reason to change my conviction in this regard. I am persuaded that if the Presbyterian Church can but forget those manifold lesser things which seem to have vexed men's hearts unduly and exhausted their energies in the last few years, and can rise to that mighty task which confronts her, this Church has, in the present and in the future, an even greater mission to fulfill in the religious life of Canada than that which she has undoubtedly fulfilled in the days that are past. And it is my hope that in the course of what I have yet to say I shall, above everything else, succeed in making clear what I conceive that mission to be.

It is possible, however, that, from what has already been said, you might be disposed to take a very different view from that just expressed. Some of you may have been wondering, if such reasons as have been treated are to be considered as quite inadequate, whether, indeed, there can be any good and valid reasons at all why you and I should find ourselves in the Presbyterian Church today. I can only say that I myself am quite confident that there are such, but, in the end, it must be left to you to judge of the worth of such reasons as I shall present, and I wish to assure you that I have not the least desire to impose my views upon you, if they themselves are not sufficient to make a genuine appeal to you.

Let me, before proceeding to these specific views, call your attention to a certain fact, and a set of circumstances which give significance to it, which, in the many discussions for and against Union, have at no time received the attention which is their due. A brief consideration of such will enable

me, as nothing else could, to come to those points which I desire to stress. I would remind you of the fact that throughout the length and breadth of this country, one hundred and forty-eight thousand communicant members of the Presbyterian Church actually voted against a proposal which, on the face of things, must have seemed to most good people to set forth a worthy aim and ideal for any church. That surely constitutes the most significant fact, in connection with all that has transpired during this Union episode. It means that upwards of half of the communicant membership of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (a purged roll of the Church at the time could not have shown figures of a membership exceeding 325,000; even this might be over-generous, since certain government statistics in succeeding years would not appear to justify this high estimate) were led to oppose this Union, and this, after a thoroughly-equipped organization, guided by a majority of the so-called influential men of the Church, had done everything in its power to persuade these people that it was their *Christian* duty to acquiesce in the proposals made. Granted, that out of that 148,000 there were some who were motivated by prejudice of one kind or another, that fact would surely not account for the attitude of the vast proportion of those people who possessed strong anti-union sentiments and gave expression to the same in the decisive and determined way they did. To consider mere prejudice as a valid explanation of this recalcitrancy on their part would constitute a strange commentary upon the entire work of the Presbyterian ministry for the last two generations. While in Scotland a few years ago, I was informed by an outstanding scholar of the Church there that Unionist leaders had suggested to him that much of the obstinacy shown toward Union, on the part of Presbyterians in Canada, was due to a presumptuous sense of

superiority, a particular disdain for Methodists and Methodism. Such an explanation came as a complete surprise to me, I assure you. I can only say that it has been my privilege, during an active ministry of upwards of twenty-five years, to serve my Church both in Eastern and Western Canada, and I have yet to find a single sign of any such spirit among the Presbyterian people. On the contrary, I have always found a deep respect – this is true even since Union – for the Methodist people, on the part of the lay-people of the Presbyterian Church. It has been notably true wherever there existed in Canada a Methodism of the original Wesleyan type. Unfortunately, there has grown up in Canada in recent years what I should like to call a Modernistic Methodism, which, to all appearance possesses little, if anything, of the pertinent religious challenge of original Wesleyanism; and for this type, I have to confess, many Presbyterians have not had the same high regard. It is worth mentioning, because it has significance for the whole problem of Union as it existed in Canada, that not a few of the most devoted workers and intelligent people who belonged to two different Presbyterian Churches in Western Canada, over which it was my lot to be minister some years ago, had come to those Churches from the Wesleyan Church in England, after having found the Methodist Church here something quite uncongenial to them; and it is not at all remarkable that all of these people are still active members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Such explanations as have been given, of which the above are examples, are obviously quite insufficient to explain the tragedy – view it from whatever side we care to – which took place in the Ecclesiastical life of Canada in 1925. A strong and vigorous Church had been rent in twain in order that a Union with other Churches, which, at the best, could only

have been looked upon as a hopeful experiment, might be attained. That which actually came to pass was, of course, totally unanticipated by those favouring Union. The Unionist leaders themselves were utterly amazed at the strength of the vote recorded against their proposals; but, instead of humbly endeavouring to learn the true significance of what had happened, they foolishly presumed to minimize that significance and its effects, and did not refrain from making it as difficult as possible for those who were determined to continue the Presbyterian Church. Much of the extreme animosity and intense bitterness existing since is due to this fact.

It is, at any rate, clear to everybody now, that these leaders had completely misjudged the temper of their own people. Their confidence and assurance, their flamboyant prognostications concerning the success of the movement seem so ridiculous in the light of what really eventuated. But there was even, on their part, a more serious failure than this. It lay in the fact that they had utterly failed to discern the depth of the religious sentiment, and the power of the religious traditions, of their people. More important still, they had indeed failed to discern the fact that the reasons set forth on behalf of Union had really never touched the springs of the people's religious life. This, in my judgment, constituted the one profound reason why all their efforts were attended with such dismal success. Whether or not such reason had assumed explicit form in the minds of those people who at the time opposed union, is, of course, a debatable question; but if we were to concede the supposition that it had not, that, in itself, would not detract from its tremendous significance. The indisputable truth remains, that a great many devoted people in the Presbyterian Church at that time did not consider this movement to be of a particularly *religious* character at all;

and for that reason, instinctively said "Nay" to it. And it is to be observed in this regard, that the most pregnant actions which have been taken in life and history, especially in religious life and history, have very seldom been the result of a clearly defined understanding of them. It was so in this case, and that fact itself was the result of tendencies and methods apparent in the Presbyterian Church in previous years, of which a great many of the people, and not a few of the ministers, were becoming increasingly dubious. To these we must now give brief consideration.

For years previous to the consummation of Union, the Presbyterian Church in Canada had become increasingly dominated by an autocratic centralized officary. The personnel of this seemed to conceive the work of the Church largely in terms of a huge enterprise, and their business, that of extending operations in the Home and Foreign mission fields, and of multiplying and intensifying church activities in local congregations. Missionary spirit was to be "drummed up" by the use of suitable periodicals, intermittent intensive campaigns and a great variety of special addresses. The minister at the "home base," as it was called, might well have considered himself, in those days, a high-pressure agent for obtaining the wherewithal to carry on operations at the "outposts" or upon the "frontiers." He was deluged with literature of various kinds, with instructions to see that it was placed in the hands of every member and adherent of his congregation. Outlines of addresses were supplied upon this or that aspect of the Church's work, that he might acquaint his people with the "programmes" and "schemes" being initiated to "advance or extend the Kingdom." I remember especially one particular year, in which I received outlines of addresses almost sufficient to cover my pulpit engagements, once a

Sabbath, for a year. I am not exaggerating in the least. I am relating an experience which was not exceptional, and I have repeated a language commonly employed by officials at the time which, in itself, is indicative of the conception of religion which very generally prevailed among them. Moreover, I have given expression here to that basic consideration, responsible for a discontent on the part of many people and not an insignificant number of ministers, which was revealing itself long before Union became a really practical consideration among the people.

Modern methods had become the vogue in Sunday School and Young People's work. Teacher training classes were instituted to acquaint Sunday School teachers with the modern views of the Bible, as well as with all those new psychological and pedagogical methods which, it was said, were destined to make the methods of former days obsolete. Children of the various "teen-ages" were encouraged to join the Church in and through the "group method." It is safe to claim that shoals of such children were taken into communion with the Church, during the course of a few years, without having possessed in the least any serious understanding of what they were undertaking or what it meant for them in any personal way. And yet surprise was expressed that, in later years, these young people, despite all the energy expended upon them, did not seem to have acquired any loyalty or affection for the Church itself. It was admitted on every hand that a leakage somehow existed between the Sunday School and the Church; that young men and young women, after graduating from the Sunday School, were showing little or no regard for the Church, or for the Church's special work. Although unaware of it at the time, the challenge which had been designed to make these young people "worthy Canadian citizens" or

“splendid idealists” had not been radical enough to create *Christian* experience, or to induce in them a desire for genuine Christian service. The teaching of Christian doctrine received very little emphasis; indeed, in some quarters, was neglected altogether. “Enthusiastic” young men were in great demand for the pulpits of the Church, and chiefly because of their enthusiasm, and of their knowledge of the newer methods. ‘Directors of Religious Education’ became a necessity in the larger churches. This sort of thing had for a time turned people’s heads, although there were some who had grave suspicions concerning it. And, although the enthusiasm once displayed in this direction has not altogether abated, I believe I am justified in saying that it is today distinctly on the ebb. It is widely recognized that the results obtained were scarcely commensurate with the efforts made, and that these results, at the best, were of a doubtful character. This whole effort, although not without certain commendable features, has been largely built upon the false supposition that a form of entertainment is more interesting to young people than genuine religion. Religious education is proving to be a much more profound matter, and a task more exacting – more challenging to teacher and pupil alike – than our modern educators suspected. Psychology of the modern type has added little to the knowledge of those whose hearts have been possessed of Christian love and Christian discernment in the dealing with children in different stages of their development.

The ministrations of the pulpit at the time, when not employed with giving information concerning the “work” of the Church, and rendering guidance to the manifold organizations which existed, were concerned very largely with the current topics and problems of the day. Purely expository preaching was the exception, and doctrinal preaching a thing

taboo. The human life of the "Historic Jesus" constituted the burden of most of the real sermons heard. Men were called upon to emulate, and to realize in their own lives, the ethical qualities of the human life of Jesus, with the inference that such qualities were natural, though perhaps only potential, characteristics of their own souls.

It was all a phase of a *modernistic* religious wave, emanating largely from United States sources, which influenced most of the Churches in Canada, but more especially the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, during the last thirty years. It is being acknowledged now that it constituted a more or less *humanistic* conception of life, which places all emphasis on *human* ideals and values, and quite ignores certain essential Christian truths concerning the relations existing between God and man, upon which the distinctive Christian doctrines have been established. Such important matters, however, cannot be considered here, but I do ask you to observe that this modernistic view of life of which I speak has nothing especially to do with those modern historical critical methods which have been applied to Scripture and which, in some quarters, have been subject to very bitter and hostile criticism. As you all know, I myself am a firm believer in such methods, when employed by truly reverent scholars and preachers, as those necessary to any true historic understanding of the Bible.

The thing I have in mind constitutes a far more serious menace to Christianity, even when we acknowledge that modern historical criticism, because of the presumptuous claims of certain of its exponents, has at times hindered rather than helped our understanding of the Bible. There is a modernistic outlook, a view of life widely prevailing, which tends to *naturalize* Christianity, to completely *humanize* it, and thus to

inoculate man effectively against the distinctive challenge of the Christian gospel. In magnifying the human qualities of man, it tends to erase the difference which exists between man, in his sinful state, and the infinite, holy God; and it thus serves to devitalize man's sense of sin and his consciousness of an absolute need for redemption. In practical Church life, this same modernistic view substitutes the external works of the Church, "its efforts on behalf of the Kingdom," for the necessity of a true soul culture and discipline. That is to say, it possesses neither for the young nor for the old a distinctive and personal *spiritual* challenge. It is to the absence of this that Karl Barth refers, when he maintains that the modern Church has largely succeeded in eradicating the "Offence," which is the fundamental factor in the Christian gospel.

It was in such an atmosphere that the Union movement was, for the most part, nurtured and developed; one, as you can perceive for yourselves, in which the importance of doctrine was largely ignored, one in which, moreover, those traditional, personal faith-attitudes to God through Christ necessary for salvation, and the profound significance of man's sin and God's grace, were, to say the least, never dangerously obtruded upon the people. The "task" of the Church was considered the paramount interest.

I have dwelt upon this characteristic of Church life in Canada chiefly to show that a great many people were, for the reasons above-mentioned, never strongly impressed with the claim that this Union movement was essentially a religious movement. They presumed, and not without reason, that it was but another "supreme effort," characteristic of those manifold "supreme ecclesiastical efforts" to which they had become accustomed, and actuated by the same motives and sponsored by precisely the same leaders. And although they

could not very well define their precise objection to such, they felt that these lacked that "something" which was essential to Christianity, a something which they believed had found expression in a traditional Presbyterianism which they had not altogether forgotten.

The truly remarkable thing about this Union movement in Canada was the general indifference displayed toward it on the part of the people right up to the year or so immediately preceding its consummation. It was looked upon as an academic question, rather than a practical one which might call for decision. Toward the conclusion of the controversy, the atmosphere was such that, if a man were disposed, on the one hand, to be indifferent as to what course the Church took, or, on the other, were determined to be loyal to the "prominent" leaders and the highest ecclesiastical court of that Church, it was an easy matter, on either ground, to enter the United Church. If, however, a man were inclined to be obstinate, to resent clerical interference and dictation, or, if he were sincerely fearful lest something great and essential in religion was being ignored, presumably in order to establish a more powerful and efficient Church, it was likewise an easy matter, on either of these grounds, to oppose the Union with might and main. Such, at any rate, was the situation as I viewed it in those days of ecclesiastical stress and strain. History, I believe, will pronounce the Union movement in Canada to have been essentially a clerical rather than a lay movement. It will reveal, moreover, that the ground was prepared for a determined resistance to Union long before that proposal became a fully practical consideration at all.

Chapter 4

A DOCTRINAL CONSIDERATION

I am obliged to confess that I have never been impressed by that power in religion which is acquired through majorities, that which is significant of bigness alone, or that which displays itself particularly in efficient organization and manifold activities. I fancy I have not appreciated the values of such as perhaps I should. I can think of no great religious movement in the history of the world which has been inaugurated with bands playing and pennons flying, that is to say, one in which it was possible to call the world to behold the fact that some great, new and good thing was taking place; that a new era, through the perspicuity, adventure, and enterprise of far-sighted men, was about to dawn.

The origins of all historic movements of a religious kind have been shrouded in mystery, when not entirely obscured in darkness. Such movements have been long on their way before the world has been at all aware of their presence. In fact, those who were a part of them have been quite unconscious in the beginnings, that that which had gripped them might possibly develop into a movement. And when, eventually, such stirrings in the hearts of men have assumed the proportions of a movement, it has invariably become a thing to be persecuted, a suspected minority, or, in the eyes of all the wise and mighty among men, something very ridiculous or

impossible. Examples of such occurrences are so plentiful that it would seem invidious to select one for particular consideration. Enough to observe that there is something about that which originates a religious movement which would inevitably be strangled at its birth, were it not borne onward by an irresistible power which does not appear to inhere in itself alone, were it not such, indeed, that those gripped by it must bear witness to it at all costs.

It is something of this nature that we have a right to look for, when this or that interest among men in the religious realm is to be denominated as "a great movement"; especially if we are to expect for it a rapid advance which, as Unionist leaders have more than once claimed in regard to their particular cause, is likely to envelop in the end the greater proportion of Christendom. In any great movement we must, first of all, be able to perceive that at its heart, there are powerful and urgent convictions – convictions which will not fall down, and which will balk at no cost. Then, besides, if it is to be a truly *religious* movement, these convictions must primarily and fundamentally be concerned, not with the relations which should exist between man and man, class and class, or even Church and Church, but rather those which should and *must* exist between man and God. That is to say, religious movements do not indicate so much a moral, humanitarian or ecclesiastical, as an essentially *spiritual* awakening. And the recognition of this fact brings us to still another fact which, above all, should be observed and considered. The truth is that religious movements have always to do with what men call *belief*; and belief when properly employed represents a relation which, in the nature of the case, can only exist between man and God. We may possess convictions concerning many of the relations and conditions which happen to

exist, or should exist, in the various circumstances of this life; but when we employ the word *belief*, it somehow stands in a different category. It refers to man's attitude as he approaches those things which are *above* him, and which have *peculiar* claims upon him. Furthermore, it is to be realized that belief always implies doctrine. It has always done so, even from its very beginnings. Belief can only sustain itself and continue to exert spiritual influence and power when supported by doctrine. Doctrine is in and through, and imperative to, any belief in God. The strength and permanency of the main stream of the Protestant Reformation, for example – much modern opinion to the contrary – when contrasted with its Mystical or Humanized off-shoots, was in its strong doctrinal affirmations alone. That movement, as we view it in its various relationships, failed to have any very permanent influence, just in proportion as here and there among its followers the emphasis was laid upon emotional, political, moral or social needs, or upon anything which savoured of the expedient or utilitarian. Not that these things are unimportant so far as religion is concerned; some of them are, in fact, extremely important, but they never do constitute the fundamental motive or principle of a religious movement. Now to this fact, and the claim implied, I must give serious attention.

But before proceeding to that task, I should like to give a moment's consideration to another matter which has been suggested through that of which I have just been speaking. It concerns an aspect of our ecclesiastical life which to you, perhaps, has been the cause of some anxiety as you have surveyed the existing situation in Canada. You have doubtless sometimes asked yourselves, and perhaps are asking yourselves at this moment: Are bigness and efficiency and power qualifications, after all, which can be despised in one's estimate of the

usefulness of a Church? Does not littleness, you may ask, always tend to Sectarianism, if not to an embittered and warped spirit? Can a Church exist on a protest; can she establish herself in a position merely negative; can she maintain her best life, if on the defensive most of the time? Moreover, does not a Church, powerful in numbers, impress the world and especially the newspapers; does not such a Church receive the attention of governments, political parties and influential secular organizations?

I admit it would be difficult to answer to your satisfaction all or any of such questions, were it not that there are interests at stake far more important than any of these. The 180,000 communicants of which the Presbyterian Church can, at present, boast is not a very imposing array, it is true, when placed in contrast, as is so often done, with 500,000; more especially since the Presbyterian Church can claim no particular superiority in piety or sanctity, nor in scholarship, enterprise or activity. In fact, in most of such recognized qualities of Church life, it will need to confess an apparent inferiority as compared with the United Church of Canada.

There is, however, as suggested above, another matter of vital importance to be taken into consideration. Presbyterians, unfortunately, have almost wholly persisted during these years in estimating themselves and the significance of their Church in the light of this country, and the conditions obtaining here, alone. In this they have followed strictly the lead given by many of those who favoured Union. An outstanding Unionist during the Union controversy set forth as his most urgent argument for the uniting of the Churches something to this effect, namely: We in Canada need and want a Church "indigenous with the soil." No remark could have been better designed to reveal the mind and spirit of the entire Union

movement as it gradually gathered momentum in the years preceding 1925. The emphasis at that time was laid almost entirely upon the immediately practical, and even upon the material interests, chiefly, I should say, upon the necessity to obviate extravagant expenditures, as well as unnecessary misunderstandings, arising out of the competitive conditions which existed. The promise that in the achievement of the proposed Union a spiritual awakening was certain to eventuate was, of course, also confidently made. How far these hopes and prognostications have been realized and fulfilled I leave you to judge for yourselves. It is at least patent to all that the expenditure for ecclesiastical purposes of one kind or another has been enormously increased; and, if I am not completely deluded as to the religious situation in Canada today, a spiritual inertia rather than an awakening has been descending upon us all. This, however, is not the consideration before us at the moment. Such an observation as the above, coming from the mouth of a distinguished and responsible leader, and reiterated again and again with all seriousness, reveals the lamentable misunderstanding which obtained at the time as to that which essentially constitutes and conditions the Church of God. Local or national conditions, it is true, must inevitably leave their distinctive marks upon any Church. The respective outlooks of this or that particular people will condition the atmosphere, even ecclesiastical structures, of those Churches to which these people happen to belong. It has been so in the past; it is good that it is so, and it will continue. But such changes as in this respect occur can never pertain to more than that which is accidental to the real life of a Church. A Church to remain a Church of God can at no time become indigenous with the soil of any particular land. Local difficulties and necessities or national predilections, important as

these are and must continue to be, can never take precedence in any way over the Church's peculiar *witness to Christ; its faith and doctrine*. Such a possibility were an inconceivable thought. The Church is and shall remain the Church of God just insofar as it is not indigenous with the soil of any country, or determined by the habits, thoughts and customs of any people. A Church which tends to become purely "nationalistic" in its instincts and in its outlook is rapidly becoming a hybrid Church. The true Church belongs to no age and no country, is conditioned by no climate, and, in the hearts of believing men, is supreme over all patriotisms or loyalties of any kind which receive the attention of men.

But, United Churchmen will protest that they have never at any time conceived of their Church along purely nationalistic lines; they have, on the contrary, always thought of it from the standpoint of a world outlook. They will say, and with certain justice, that they have not attempted, or suggested, any change in their customary witness to Christ, except in so far as they have hoped to enlarge and purify that witness. From one point of view, they are quite justified in these claims. At the same time, they have represented, on the whole, a point of view indicative of a very superficial conception of the *Church*; for the fact remains that such things as faith, witness, doctrines, creeds, etc., have received but the scantiest consideration from them. There was at no time during this whole Union movement any serious attempt among those, for instance, in the Presbyterian Church who favoured the movement to discover what the peculiar and traditional witness of the Presbyterian Church actually was and signified. These men were not particularly interested in such things, and counted them as of secondary importance. They invariably appealed for Union on grounds of practical necessity, upon the claims

of an existing larger tolerance among peoples and Churches alike, and upon the undisguised pride of possessing a singular broad-mindedness. A condition, indeed, existed in Canada throughout the whole struggle in which a doctrineless, modernistic view of life quite inhibited any serious consideration of those particular matters which we have under consideration. The weakness of Methodism, especially in its uninspired periods, has undoubtedly been a failure to appreciate the importance of a definite theology. And Presbyterianism in Canada in a kind of protest against a purely sterile, rigid, scholastic interpretation of Calvinism, and imbued with the general anthropocentric outlook upon life which has prevailed, found itself in a mood to entertain Union proposals mainly based upon considerations of a practical nature without any particular thought to other matters.

We Presbyterians must begin to learn as we have not done so far that we constitute no "bleeding fragment" in a local ecclesiastical situation, but rather a small, but important, branch of the great Reformed Church of the world; the largest Protestant body of Christians existing. According to Dr. Ogilvie, it is a Church which ministers to not less than forty million souls. We need not, therefore, take very seriously the warning of some of our Unionist friends, that a Church "cannot continue to exist on a mere protest." If our protest has been a serious one at all, and if we are willing to discern the real significance of that protest and to obligate ourselves accordingly, there is certain to issue, but just in proportion as we are absolutely sincere in the matter, a new vision of God which will compel among us a positive aggressive gospel, which in turn, will restore a confidence, deep and true, in the Church of Jesus Christ itself. Protestantism itself began with a deep-seated protest, but it flowered forth with a vision of

God almost unique in Christian history. So far as our particular situation is concerned, everything would seem to depend upon how willing we are to know that which we, as Presbyterians, should essentially stand for, and how ready we are to accept such, as the all-governing principle of our personal lives and of our ministerial vocations.

It had been my feeling from the first – and I am much more convinced of it in recent years – that in any Union proposals which were to be made, we should first of all have advocated and sought closer fellowship with, and a more intimate understanding of, the other Reformed Churches of the world. We should have striven at any rate to understand ourselves better, and should have determined to understand ourselves especially in the light of the original witness, and of the unquestioned aims and motives of the early Reformed Church itself. It is a very great question whether any satisfactory or permanent union is possible at all, until Churches of different lineage rediscover themselves in the light of their original *witnesses to Christ*, and thus put themselves in a position to approach each other with a view to a new and larger understanding.

It is a rather remarkable commentary on the whole union procedure in Canada, that the Reformed Church stands out today, prominent among many Churches, as that one which is coming to herself in a new strength, a new vigour of spiritual life, in many lands, and just because men have touched upon and are revealing to others those springs of spiritual insight and light, which first brought their Church into existence. The Reformed Church is becoming conscious, perhaps in a way that cannot be said of any other Church, of her spiritual mission to the world, and this, owing to the fact that she is discovering her own fountain springs, and is finding these to be

as fresh and challenging today as they were to the men of the sixteenth century. The *attitude to God*, which the *vision of God* in the sixteenth century compelled, is found to be just as true and imperative for the men of the twentieth century.

But, to return to this question of doctrine, it is generally acknowledged that the United Church of Canada has not seen fit to place any *particular* emphasis upon the necessity for a definite doctrinal understanding or attitude, in regard to those vital interests which essentially concern a Church. There were in it at the first members who were truly concerned about this matter, but their views have apparently not been those which have generally prevailed. There have been leaders in that Church, who, with a proud scorn for others who have felt the necessity of a definite attitude concerning matters pertaining to doctrine, creeds, and the true tenets of Christian belief, have boasted that the United Church is unique among Churches in that it makes no absolute demand regarding such matters upon those who would enter that communion, or upon those who would enter the order of its ministry. The Doctrinal Basis which the United Church has adopted is, on the face of it, obviously a sort of compromise. In fact, in the nature of the situation existing when it was drawn up, it had to be. One receives the impression that that doctrinal basis is strictly the product of minds which were conscious of the fact that they must succeed in erasing the offensive aspects of the older Confessions, that they must soften, modify or accentuate where necessary, in order that those differences concerning which contentions have arisen, and were likely again to arise, might be left as a sort of innuendo. Consciously, or unconsciously, these men were too much under the dominance of the prevailing popular theological temper and outlook of the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries; a period in

which indulgent human sentimentalities were the governing factors in religious thought. It is increasingly recognized that religious thought was largely of that character in the period referred to.

This, however, is not the profoundest defect which is to be discovered in that Doctrinal Basis. It is not that anything in that statement of Christian beliefs is to be considered erroneous or false. On the contrary, the various affirmations made there are probably, one and all, true in themselves, but as a whole, the statement absolutely lacks that peculiar *unity* which is the distinguishing mark of every great Creed or Confession. There is no new compelling vision of God in it, nothing which makes the reader feel that the framers of it were men who had so discovered God, that what God was, and had become to them, must, if necessary, ride rough-shod over all purely human obstacles of thought, secular, sectarian or ecclesiastical, and must altogether transcend the maudlin religious sentimentalism and platitudinisms of a pampered age. There is not the faintest impression to be received from that doctrinal basis of any such vision, nor of that vital unity which such a vision inevitably creates. The truth is, as I have had occasion to say to you so often in the classroom, that creeds are not *made*; they are always born, often born in blood. It is a significant fact that a committee chosen from the best minds of the Church of Scotland, with a view to bringing in an adequate revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith, have in their successive reports to Assemblies, virtually acknowledged the above claim. However defective in some important respects we may consider our present Confession of Faith, we can do no other but await the necessary circumstances which can give birth again to that which, in our day, "*must be said concerning God*" first, and then "*concerning*

man and this world." Nothing less than this can hope, in any permanent way, to provide a Confession which will arouse men's interest, or produce a statement of belief to which they will be obliged to give eager obedience and true fidelity. It was a striking commentary upon the spirit of compromise and timidity which produced "the doctrinal basis of Union," when the *Christian Century*, an American religious paper particularly friendly to the United Church and thoroughly in accord with its aims and motives, was constrained to say concerning its statement of faith words to this effect – that it was exceedingly to be regretted that such a promising Union movement could not have broken new ground and produced a Creed something in harmony with the virile new religious thought of our time.

Bitter things have been said concerning the Westminster Confession of Faith in recent years, and scorn has been heaped upon it. I, myself, am obliged to acknowledge that, obviously, there are suggestions in it which seem to lead to erroneous conclusions; and it surely embodies beliefs which have been pressed beyond the truth which they actually bear. I believe that the Westminster Confession reflects too palpably the peculiar conditions of its time. It is certain that those who created it were far too much bent upon finding intellectual satisfaction, and upon giving concrete definition to those Christian intuitions and experiences which, on final analysis, can never be treated in that purely intellectual fashion. An intellectualizing is everywhere apparent in the Confession, which has served to obscure and indeed to pauperize those great spiritual insights, which are undoubtedly present there, rather than to illumine them. With all their reverence for God, these authors of the Confession had still failed to attain the *highest* reverence.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the framers of that Confession, as was the case with all the other Reformed Confessions, had *seen* God anew. Such is the unmistakable impression to be received from its pages. In that vision of God, and that vital unity of thought and motive, which I have already claimed as characteristic of every great Creed or Confession, the Westminster Confession is infinitely superior to the Doctrinal Basis submitted to, and accepted by, the United Church. Anyone who has seriously studied the one hundred and fifty years of history subsequent to 1517, and who possesses an ordinary measure of historic imagination, who is not altogether insensitive to spiritual understanding and reality, cannot for one moment doubt the fact that a unique and supreme vision of God had laid hold of a multitude of people and their gifted leaders in that period. It was a *vision of God*, in which God stands transcendent over all ecclesiasticisms, over all affairs of the lives of men, and the interests and destinies of nations, as well as over all bickerings, dangers, ominous forebodings and all strife which might exist amongst such, transcendent and commanding over all achievements of man, over man's experiences, over man's thoughts, or the merits or deserts which he might claim for himself; transcendent and sovereign over all spiritual presumptions, over sins of every kind and their consequences, and most important, over all doubts concerning faith, over all other fears and anxieties which are the afflictions even of believing men. If ever men trusted God and no other beside Him, they were those who possessed this powerful sense of God's absolute sovereignty. There has been no greater religious truth among men, none more designed to produce the humble, unselfish, and yet robust character, than the thought of the "Sovereignty of God," when its true significance is seen and understood

from the inside, that is, through the eyes of genuine faith. It has been a matter to be profoundly regretted that the Reformers failed to conserve the strictly *religious* significance of this supreme truth; that which alone was the originating spring of the Reformation. As it was, they turned to the easier method of interpretation, i.e., in terms of God's "omnipotence" and "omniscience," as Principal Oman puts it. Accordingly, the idea of *force*, more and more, supplanted the idea of holy and sovereign *love*, as Reformed scholastic theologians gave expression to the view they held concerning God's relation to men. It was to such a truth that those who were assembled at Westminster in 1642, were, under divine compulsion, endeavouring as best they could to give some sort of adequate expression, especially as this truth related itself to the various aspects of Christian life and faith. And the Westminster Confession of Faith was the result of their effort. Their production possesses a unity, despite its defects, which results only from spiritual compulsion, vision, and insight. Such is surely of inestimable value as compared with a statement of belief, the most obvious characteristic of which is an uninspired prosy correctness. I have found it so, at any rate. Indeed, where is there to be discovered a truth more commanding, more Catholic, and more broad-minded in a truly Christian sense, than this which we have claimed to be the ground conviction of the Reformed Church?

When, however, all such important considerations have been given due recognition and evaluation, that is not tantamount to a claim, that there is necessarily something absolutely final about the Westminster Confession, either when considered as a whole, or in its various parts. There is nothing which forbids the Christian man of this day examining it, testing it, and even questioning its absolute right, to govern

Christian life and practice. The Westminster Confession must always be on judgment, to vindicate itself before living faith and true Christian experience, and before the Holy Scripture especially. Contentions to the contrary – and such are not infrequently made, or assumed – would involve the Presbyterian Church in an impossible situation, were they taken seriously. Such contentions would set at naught what the framers of that Confession had evidently most at heart. For it is apparent, if we may trust such records as we still possess in regard to their views on this matter, that English and Scottish Presbyterianism was in true accord with what was a vital Reformed *principle* among the Reformed leaders on the continent. But we shall have to deal with this aspect of our subject in the following chapter.

THE ATTITUDE OF ORIGINAL ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIANISM TO THE CREEDS, CONFESSIONS AND STANDARDS

I have already maintained that those who were called upon to give utterance to their Christian faith, as it is found expressed in the Westminster Confession, recognize that statement of it as one *distinctly subordinate* to something higher and more authoritative. That is to say, the Confession is considered to be subordinate to Holy Scripture, or rather, to the *witness* to God contained in that Scripture to men of faith. This important fact is never to be forgotten. It is so important and has been so continually ignored by ardent Presbyterians in this and other ages, that it is necessary to give definite evidence concerning the claim here made as to these Reformers' views.

The early Reformed Churchmen, if we consider them first of all in a general way, placed less emphasis on Creeds and Confessions than the leaders of the other Churches of the time. Furthermore, it is also a fact, corresponding and relative, and as indicating their general viewpoint at the time, that these Reformed Churchmen placed no *particular* emphasis

on ecclesiastical forms, rites or practices. One would infer from recent tendencies within the Presbyterian Church that they had done precisely this. It is true that they assumed that the Reformed, and not the Roman, Church constituted the true Church of God. In fact, they usually spoke of themselves as *the* Church reformed. As a consequence, it did not occur to them that changes were necessary in the traditional rites, forms or practices, except insofar as these had degenerated, or were not authorized by Scripture, or had been given a significance by the Roman Church which they did not bear. They accepted the traditional practice of the Church as a necessary part of it, after having, as they believed, purified such and given it its lawful significance. Accordingly, no particular claims, based upon matters of a peculiarly ecclesiastical character, except a certain emphasis on the central place given to the Presbyter should, on purely Reformation grounds, be made on behalf of the Presbyterian Church. In ecclesiastical matters and in forms of worship there was apparently a certain elasticity; and, in regard to these, considerable latitude was permitted for different views.

One or two references, however, (and I shall select these from the early Reformed Church in Scotland alone) will suffice to show, both in respect to credal statements and ecclesiastical requirements, that the contention made above is a valid one.

The introductory paragraph of the earliest Scottish Confession (1560) contains this statement:

“Protesting that gif any man will note in this our Confession any artickle or sentence repugning to Godis Holie Word, that it Wald pleis him of his gentilness, and for Christeane cheriteis saik, to admoncis us of the samyn in writt; and we of our honouris and fidelitie do

promeis unto him satisfioun fra the mowthe of God (that is fra his Holy Scriptureis) or ellis, reformatioun of that quhilk he sall prove to be amys."

As Professor D.H. Fleming remarks in his *The Reformation in Scotland* (p. 245), this is "an admission of fallibility and professed willingness to receive more light." Professor Fleming calls attention (p. 261) to another passage from the same Confession which is very significant, because it is so arresting when compared with some of the more intolerant and exclusive claims made for ecclesiastical forms and orders by certain Presbyterians. I myself believe that it reveals the deeper understanding motivating the whole Reformation. It runs as follows:

"Not that we think that ane policie and ane ordour in ceremonies can be appointit for all aigis, tymes and plaicis; for as ceremonies (sick as men hes devised) at but temporall, so may and aucht they to be changed, when they rather foster superstitioun, than that they edifie the Kirk using the same."

John Row, the historian, (son of John Row who was an active participant among those who prepared the Confession of Faith (1560) as well as the First Book of Discipline) was perhaps in a better position to know the inner spirit and mind of the very earliest Reformers in Scotland than most men, and he writes:

"The ministers that were, took not their pattern from any Kirk in the world, no, not fra Geneva itself; but, laying God's Word before them, made reformation according thereunto. both in doctrine first, and then in discipline, when and as they might get it overtaken."

It is clear from such passages that neither in credal definition, nor in ecclesiastical emphasis, was there in those days the rigid, stereotyped view in regard to such matters, which has been too apparent among us in Canada in recent years.

If we turn now to a consideration of the views of those who were responsible for the Westminster Confession of Faith itself, which, after two and a half years' labour spent upon it, was approved in 1647 and ratified by the respective Parliaments of Scotland in 1649 and 1690, we find something of the same healthy point of view in regard especially to credal claims, but also in respect to forms of worship and practice.

If we consult the Preface (p. 135)² and especially pages 136-7 of the *Directory for Public 'Worship of God,'* we will observe that the authors acknowledge that in such matters as that Directory covers there has been accomplished a definite and recognized work in the reign of Edward VI, namely, the Book of Common Prayer. They acknowledge also that these earlier framers of the articles of Faith had been obviously led by God's Holy Spirit, but they humbly recognize at the same time that, through new untoward circumstances which had eventuated, it was now necessary to amplify the previous work, and make necessary emendations. They believed that they were impelled to do so by the same Holy Spirit. Let me point out that, if this is a true estimate of the attitude assumed to such matters by these early Presbyterian fathers, it is very unlikely that they would deny the possibility that the Holy Spirit might lead Christian people three centuries afterwards to execute, if necessary, a similar work in regard to the same

²As in the edition containing the Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechism, etc.

matters. Any other supposition would be one which would lead Presbyterians into spiritual insolvency.

But even more important than the above consideration is a fact revealed with particular pertinence, so far as our subject is concerned, by Professor Daniel Lamont in his little book, *The Church and the Creeds*. Professor Lamont can scarcely be characterized as an enthusiastic admirer of the Westminster Confession, nevertheless, after calling attention to a distinction which exists between Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism, he proceeds to point out (p. 82ff) that the Westminster Confession, which "follows the Irish Articles somewhat closely both in form and language" in all other respects, significantly enough, in its first Chapter, omits the reference to the ecumenical Creeds, namely, the Nicene, the Athanasian, and even the Apostles' Creed, as these are, in the above Articles, definitely associated with Holy Scripture. Not that the Westminster Confession refuses to accept the teaching of these Creeds for it uses and enjoins the use of the same in other places, but, as Professor Lamont says, "The omission is due to the express desire to make it plain that the Church must avoid the very appearance of allowing any human document to come between it and its fountainhead of revealed truth in the Holy Scripture."³

We should not, however, pass on without observing *what these Reformers meant by, Holy Scripture*. It was certainly not to be conceived as it is so often understood by men now, in terms of its bare, bald statement of facts. Something deeper than that interested them. Their writings everywhere imply

³ See also a definite and pertinent passage concerning synods and councils which is relevant to this claim, Confession of Faith Chapter XXXI, iv.

that they were making a distinction between what they denominate at times as the "Word of God" and Scripture, that is, as the latter may be simply read and understood in an external way. Professor Lamont rightly claims: "The absoluteness of Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and life is qualified by the Westminster Confession in two ways. 1) Scripture must be interpreted by itself [to prevent, presumably, a Church setting itself up as an equal authority with Scripture]. 2) The Scripture is authoritative only as it is borne home to a man by the testimony of the Holy Spirit."

Such considerations, accordingly, ought to be sufficient to make clear the claim that stereotyped views of Creeds, Confessions or of Scripture, do not find any justification from among the views of the early Reformers. Even presumptuous ecclesiastical claims, on behalf of Presbyterianism, are not in accord with the inner spirit and profounder faith of those who were the pioneers of the Reformed Church.

The Reformed Church has been distinctly doctrinal in emphasis throughout its history. Some have even suggested that a purely doctrinal interest has constituted its characteristic motive, and has alone given rise to that enthusiasm which has sustained this Church during the last three or four centuries. Such a view represents but an aspect of that complete misunderstanding of the true significance of this Church, which unfortunately, has been characteristic of the views of many, both of its friends and of its foes.

As I have stated, more than once, no Church in its beginnings placed less stress upon doctrines and Confessions as having authority in themselves. None has so definitely refused to recognize ancient Creeds or rigid ecclesiastical dogma as possessing authoritative importance apart from the revealing Word of God itself. And yet, no Church in its beginnings has

shewn a more penetrating and profound sense of the real significance of doctrine. It had clearly perceived the great and precise importance to be attached to doctrine, while refraining from giving such, that paramount importance it had acquired formerly in the Roman Catholic, and later in the Lutheran Churches. *This is the consideration which must receive serious attention again today, if we as Presbyterians are really to understand our own position.* If I may again quote from Karl Barth, for there is no theologian of modern times, let me repeat, who has so penetrated to the heart of the Reformation movement, "Reformed doctrine would be that which we would express if we could speak as bond and not free, in subjection to over-mastering truth and not in gratuitous self-expression, under the necessity of a reality which threatens on every side, and not under the illusion of a sovereign power of choice." If we can find our way into the inner significance of such words, we shall have discovered the religious motive which brought the Reformed Church into existence. Nothing else, let me emphasize, stands in the same category of importance in any consideration we may give that Church. We have discovered here the one important, the all-essential matter, which should compel us to stand by this Reformed Church in a day like the present. Unfortunately, there is as yet no apparent evidence that Presbyterianism as it exists in Canada possesses any such conception or, indeed, any clear conception at all as to what it essentially stands for. Such constitutes its weakness. If the Presbyterian Church fails to recognize this as a genuine weakness, it may go on existing, it is true; it may, in fact, continue to do useful and necessary Christian routine work; nevertheless, it will possess no specific significance which would justify an ecclesiastical existence apart from other Churches.

But more than this is to be observed. Many leaders in the Reformed Church are, at the present time, truly concerned about this doctrinal emphasis. They are concerned that the significance which their Church has attached to doctrine and belief in the past shall be conserved, but only in the fresh and intelligent way in which it was understood in the beginning. They are anxious about this, because it is increasingly being perceived among Protestant thinkers generally that true spiritual life in the Church demands, and depends upon, just such an emphasis. It is being realized afresh that wherever the doctrinal emphasis in Christianity has been neglected or ignored altogether, the spiritual character of its faith and worship has greatly suffered, when, indeed, there has not been a complete deterioration in this regard. For without positive doctrinal foundations there can be no true basis for authority in religion, and, without authority, essential Christian belief gives place to all those sentimentalisms and "relativisms" which have so largely dominated the moral and religious life of modern times, with obviously baneful effects.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, if she is to be true to her heritage, and indeed to her present trust, must remain steadfast by this characteristic doctrinal emphasis. This, in my judgment, constitutes her supreme spiritual mission in this country at the present time. She can't afford to remain serenely unperturbed in this regard, no matter what scorn or contempt she may be subjected to on that account. For it would appear almost certain, that the future is with that Church which will courageously take her stand for a more positive and definitely theological understanding of the Christian faith, and this, in a renewed and vital understanding of doctrine along the traditional lines. Every sign at the present time is pointing in that direction. As I see it, the sit-

uation in this land, as well as in other lands, is one which calls for men of scholarship, thought and insight, who sincerely believe in the importance of doctrine, and this in order that the spiritual mission of the Church may be revealed and safeguarded. The Presbyterian Church, if she can humble herself to learn to understand anew her real significance, is admirably fitted both by tradition and inclination to supply that truly *spiritual* challenge for which so many people in recent years have yearned. People everywhere, I need not tell you, have been wistfully waiting, if not clamouring, for positive preaching of a more evangelical type. Owing to the absence of such preaching among the Churches, sects have become innumerable, and are getting the ear of many serious people in a way that the Churches have failed to do. What the modern Church has been denominating as *spiritual* (meaning by that term the idealistic temper and outlook, or the insight based upon the higher ethical values of life) is not the meaning to be discovered concerning it either in traditional theology or in the New Testament. The importance of this fact is being acknowledged more and more every day. "The things of the spirit are spiritually discerned" means that there is a unique discernment of truth, coming as it does from the Spirit of God to that man of faith who has absolutely surrendered his life to His mercy. This constitutes a rather different challenge from that generally heard in the modernistic Church. The teaching of the Sects is in this respect much nearer that demanded by the New Testament than that which usually emanates from our more highly respectable modern Churches, however much we may desire to overlook that fact.

Now, I trust that in making this rather unusual claim, you will in no wise misunderstand me. The task to which I would

direct your attention is a most serious and most difficult one, from whatever angle you care to view it. When we speak of doctrine and of faith, we must be careful to acquaint ourselves with these, from the inside, not from the outside. Much of the emphasis which has been put upon doctrinal teaching in recent years is based upon an inadequate, very often a completely false, conception both of doctrine and of faith. For one simply to attempt to adopt or to imitate what popularly goes by the name of "true gospel preaching" would be to pervert his own soul. A man would invite delusion for himself, and encourage nothing more than hypocrisy among his people, were he to do no better in his preaching than strive to put emphasis on aspects of Christian truth which, were either merely traditional, or were in popular demand. Everything in a Church, on final analysis, depends upon the reality which exists in the souls of its ministers, especially in respect to those profound matters which concern their own personal attitudes to what is essentially Christian truth. To come to terms with himself in this respect is the first task of every man who would serve in the Christian ministry. A truth is worthless, either to yourself or to your people, except as it has become *truth* to you through personal insight and spiritual perception. The same is true of doctrine, and indeed of everything that concerns your faith. To disregard this claim as the supreme task of the individual minister must be fatal to him in the end; and this admonition applies to the ministers of all churches.

In the peculiar situation in which Presbyterians in Canada find themselves today, there is a further responsibility laid upon the Presbyterian ministry, and one which is all-important for any useful service it may hope to render to this country. It is, that Presbyterian ministers must make it their deliberate

aim, and a matter of conscience, to discover what essential Presbyterianism signifies – that is, what the Reformed Church actually has stood for in the past, and must stand for in the future. In this way only can her ministers help the Church at this time, and most effectively realize the privileges of their own ministry. And if this applies to the ministry in general, it would seem to apply to you younger men in a very particular way.

At the heart of the Reformation movement there was undeniably an evangelical view of Christianity in contrast with a purely sacramentarian view of it. In a great sense, it may be claimed that in its evangelical interpretation of Christianity is to be found the true significance of Protestantism itself. But it is to be observed that the term *evangelical* is one of profound doctrinal, as well as religious, significance. It has to do primarily with a right understanding of faith, a faith which is based ultimately upon a unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and in such a way, that in all its various aspects it necessarily involves an apprehension of Christianity as doctrinal in character. That doctrine, however, must not be considered as a static quantity – a body of truths or revelations handed down to men, which may be simply accepted as such. It must be something, the truth of which appeals solely because it is personally perceived to be true through a faith that has learned to trust not man's views, not even the Church's views, but in Christ's redeeming work, as you and I and other men of faith are permitted to know such directly. Much that goes by the name of evangelical preaching today is in no sense of this character, even when it vehemently protests that it *is* so. Much so-called "Gospel reaching" is neither the fruit of severely disciplined thinking nor of true spiritual understanding. The appeal of such preach-

ing is often either of a purely emotional character, or the outcome of purely dogmatic authoritative asseverations which require nothing more than mere external intellectual assent. In the history of the Presbyterian Church (especially do we find such in the history of the Church of Scotland), there has been a type of Christianity, characterized by the name *evangelical*, which has received no end of praise from men of succeeding ages, and has been especially esteemed for its heroic qualities. Much of it has obviously not been of a truly evangelical character. It was, indeed, at times, not much more than a bigoted fanaticism, placing, as it did, all emphasis upon nonessentials, upon human prejudices, or national covenants, and possessing a Judaistic spirit and outlook upon life which constituted it the very reverse of evangelical Christian faith. Even then, we may justly claim, its instincts for what was essential in Christianity were often far more profound and penetrating than those of that ecclesiastical nationalism or purely moral *rationalism*, which so bitterly opposed it.

The evangelical gospel, therefore, which characterized the original Reformation, is one which requires determined and sustained thinking, if we are to appreciate truly its living quality, if we are to perceive at all its truly great significance for our own age. I am insisting upon this fact because the challenge I would put before you is no superficial one, nor one which will come to full fruition in a day. It will require hard thinking quite as much as faithful living and zealous preaching. Above all, it will require a *personal* response on your part to that soul-shaking challenge which is in Jesus Christ. And, if all signs do not fail, I venture to predict that if you can accept this challenge you will find yourselves in the days to come in a truly vital and momentous religious movement.

I am concluding my consideration of this *doctrinal* reason for opposing Union in Canada by saying that I find myself more and more among those, sometimes considered rather curious individuals, who are obliged to believe that in our Christian life there is nothing more important than *true* doctrine, nothing more imperative to the life of the Church than *right* belief. Those common, but nonetheless fatuous and inane sayings, emanating largely from feature-writers in modern newspapers, namely, "that it is not what a man *believes* but what he *is*, which constitutes him a Christian," or, "that the true religion of life is not the saving of our poor individual souls for a future that is to come, but the getting on with the emancipation of mankind from the evils of the here and now," have, I confess, roused my ire more than once. It is sheer folly to believe that a man can be anything that matters at all in this world, who does not possess the most serious, deep-grounded and *right* convictions concerning what God essentially is, and concerning those necessities which alone secure a right relation with Him. It is equally absurd to suggest that *salvation* or *emancipation* possesses any discernable meaning at all apart from all those matters which concern man's ultimate destiny, and especially apart from those conditions which constitute his own individual life in a world like this, as he finds himself, if honest in his own soul, in baffling contradiction to what God essentially is. What, in the very depths of his own soul, a man knows himself to be, what he genuinely *believes* God to be – i.e., what his essential understanding of existence itself is – will determine absolutely what he himself will be, and what he shall be enabled to do in this world. Indeed, what man believes concerning God determines not only his individual conduct but the destiny of races, the character of religions,

and even the future of every civilization. People who hold superficial views of God based upon passing sentiments, indulgent fancies, or the apparent needs of contemporaneous situations are doomed to disappointment, and are to be pitied rather than despised. The scions of modern journalism have indulged their readers in these later days in a confidence that definite and well-defined doctrines in religion are not the important matters that they were once thought to be, until this belief itself has become a veritable *dogma* among them. And in this regard, it should be said that it is high time that the Church of God spoke with unmistakable authority in respect to those things which concern her alone. She must absolutely refuse to be deterred by popular opinions of this or that age, or of this or that passing mood, and must scorn to leave these higher considerations concerning faith and doctrine to the vagaries of the religious dilettantism of the modern newspaper writer.

I have been obliged to dwell upon this matter of doctrine at length because, more than anything else, the importance to be attached to it influenced me to perceive and believe that herein was to be found the real weakness of the Union movement as it developed in Canada. It is obvious that the United Church as a whole has had no very serious sense of the tremendous role that doctrine must play in the real life of a Church. Much that animates that Church, especially in the emphasis it has put upon practical matters, and in the undoubted courage it has already shewn in facing existing problems in our national life, calls for admiration. (One could wish that the Presbyterian Church might reveal a similar regard for such considerations.) And yet, there is another thing which is still more important, because it is fundamental. It is inevitable that the United Church will in the near future

acknowledge this claim; for Christian thought everywhere is steadily moving in that direction (see Note below). In fact, many of the shrewdest minds in that Church had recognized years ago the importance which must be placed upon a more truly traditional theology. At any rate, with all due modesty, I believe the Presbyterian Church can give that needed emphasis, reminding you, at the same time, that much of the emphasis that has already been given in this connection is of that spurious type, which must be shunned at all costs. This we can correct, without at the same time hitching our chariot to a Modernism or a Liberalism which is recognized everywhere, except perhaps in certain quarters in the United States and Canada, to be a well-nigh spent religious force..

Such thoughts as I have just given expression to were very much in my mind in 1925 and in the years preceding. But, I confess, they have come to real vitality only in more recent years. There are two or three additional important personal reasons why I found myself opposed to this Union movement. Since, however, much that I should have said concerning these has been anticipated in my consideration of this doctrinal reason, they may be dealt with much more briefly.

NOTE

The devotion of the nineteenth century to the "Historic Jesus" was rudely disturbed by the publication of Albert Schweitzer's book, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, in 1906. In this book, Schweitzer contended that no such personage, as the 19th century portrayed Jesus to be, ever existed. He contended, moreover, that the whole outlook of the New Testament was strictly of an eschatological character and that the

modern evolutionary view as applied to the Kingdom of God was utterly inept.

The Form-geschichtliche Schule of which Rudolf Bultmann's book, *Jesus*, in the series, *Die Unsterblichen*, is a representative book, completed the tendencies of Schweitzer's thought. The result has been that the long quest for the historical Jesus which began with David Friedrich Strauss's *Leben Jesu* in 1835, and which had attempted to discover the Jesus of history strictly, apart from all theological biases, has completely exhausted itself, indeed, has ended in a skepticism concerning any certain knowledge men might possess in regard to the sayings and deeds of Jesus. It is believed by this school that faith-forms or faith-attitudes are more important in the interpretation of the significance of Jesus Christ than the incidents of His historic life. That is to say, the Christ of faith is more important than the Jesus of history.

The Barthian school is leading the way in the new responsibility which has thus been thrust upon scholars. This school has shewn that modern Idealism and traditional Christianity represent radically different views of, and challenges to, life, and must therefore part company. Eschatology, through the work of this school, has recovered its original significance in the thought of men. No good scholar, for instance, would think today of separating the faith of St. Paul from that of Jesus, as was so commonly done in nineteenth century thought. The religious outlook, in a word, has been all but revolutionized in the course of twenty-five years, and, in the process, a virile theological consciousness has been born. The tendency, therefore, is again definitely set toward a vital theological understanding of the Christian faith.

Chapter 6

A MORE ESSENTIALLY RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATION

As I have previously intimated, a considerable number of those who were opposed to Church Union were thus determined in their attitude to it, by the fact that they were really doubtful if the motive underlying the movement was to be considered of an essentially religious character. This does not necessarily mean that these people were presuming to question the individual motives of men and women who were advocating union. Nor does it signify that they were presuming to claim that the Union movement was in no way concerned with interests of a religious nature.

What actually concerned them, and was the cause of real doubt and anxiety, was quite another and more vital matter, and a matter more difficult to treat and to define without risk of misunderstanding. "Something of chaos," says a modern writer, "seems to cling around all reality, round, at least, such of our thoughts as most clearly approximate to reality. Our biggest truths are never our tidiest, most logic-groomed ones." This is as true of our intuitions, as it is of our thoughts or of our truths; more especially so, when the intuitions are of a somewhat negative character, when they reveal no more than an instinctive warning against over-pretentious claims of various kinds which confront us in life.

There was abroad in this country, during this Union controversy, a deep-seated feeling that the movement was not primarily concerned with that *need* which was truly at the heart of all our religious difficulties. It was felt that the Union movement offered no great promise for a betterment of the prevailing conditions of religious life. Not a few believed that this movement possessed neither a *spiritual* grounding, nor a *spiritual* challenge. They claimed that it had been "worked up," mainly by ministers, or by prominent wealthy laymen who perhaps were finding the constant and increasing monetary demands made upon them personally on behalf of Church schemes and enterprises rather onerous and irritating. It was certainly obvious that *the desire for union did not arise out of any particular yearning for a fellowship of a spiritual nature*, on the part of the great body of the peoples of these different Churches. Accordingly, in view of this lack, it was felt by many that no real union could be effected. Organic union, if it means anything of significance for a church, must pertain to those profound beliefs or attitudes of soul which really govern and determine the lives of its individual people. Real Christian fellowship always possesses discriminating ethical content and motive, at the very least. But more genuinely, it is the direct product of some kind of spiritual compulsion in which men have been humbled before God, or, have discovered anew some profound reason for an infinite gratitude to Him. Out of this alone does a deep understanding of other people's lives arise, and a spiritual fellowship therefore becomes possible only when this is present. But nothing of this sort was apparent in all that Union struggle; not certainly, as a directing and determining motive or influence. Organic union, it ought to be obvious to everyone, cannot have to do with a mere readjustment of what is external to the

real inner religious life or vital beliefs of the membership of the Church. And if it should so happen that Churches, for certain practical, prudent or utilitarian reasons, find it convenient to covenant together in some kind of working arrangement, or federal union, they should not expect from such union any harvest, exceeding in quality or in interest that for which they have sown.

For the last fifty or more years, we have been witnesses to the rise of a series of remarkable fellowships in which men have been drawn together through common interests, mainly through a compelling zest for the discovery of truth, or in search for, and out of sheer love of, knowledge. We have found such among our scientific men, among Biblical scholars, among philosophers. Such fellowships have been notable features of modern life, notable most of all, because of the fact that they have been hindered or stopped by no national, no ecclesiastical boundaries of any kind. They have extended here and there at will, wherever the intellectual spirit, the common constraint of truth, have laid hold upon men, and have drawn them together. Far more impressive have these been, to my mind, than anything men have contrived to achieve in connection with the union of various Churches here in Canada, or elsewhere; more impressive and hopeful because they have been established upon the substantial reality of wide-spread convictions concerning the truths about this universe, about social conditions in this world, about man's relation to man, about religions, and about the historic Christian Bible itself.

But it is to be observed, that even the sharing of such well-grounded convictions does not constitute a sufficient cause to unite people in true and enduring fellowship in Jesus Christ. The essential consideration in this latter fellowship is

not primarily convictions concerning truths, but rather concerning the *Truth*, as it comes to man alone through faith, and the surrender of his soul to God in Christ. It is this mark especially which distinguishes the Church of God in Jesus Christ from every human society, every brotherhood, every fellowship in the quest of truths and in the discovery of knowledge, every merely ecclesiastical establishment. This fellowship constitutes the real Church of God, and it runs across all the more artificial boundaries, intellectual, political, national, and even ethical or ecclesiastical. The saints of God are to be found among Fundamentalists and Modernists, among Catholics and Protestants, among the Sects, as well as among the Churches. People, wherever found, who live by faith in Jesus Christ are the Saints of God. They constitute a sort of invisible unity in the world, which man can neither make nor break. I have been frequently employing the term spiritual throughout these addresses with a very specific purpose in view. I am quite aware that this word is open, in these days, to grave misunderstandings. The quality of *spirituality* has often been identified with a certain type of piety, which the ordinary good religious man has not found very congenial. Of course, we must always acknowledge that the Spirit of God is not, at any time, likely to prove an altogether congenial or even a comfortable Presence to the *natural* man. But in this instance I am not particularly thinking of the *natural* man; I am thinking of the honest man of faith, who knows in his heart that his spiritual attainments have never been very great, and who craves, when *spirituality* is spoken of, for reality above all, especially in those who would teach him concerning it. Spirituality is commonly claimed by severely orthodox people to be the exclusive possession of those who have acquired the right mode of believing, or particularly of those

who have accepted and are living in accord with God's precise plan of salvation. By others, it is to be recognized by the possession of certain emotional or mystical experiences. Not infrequently it has unreality – that is, a self-righteousness and hypocrisy. As a consequence, when employed in modern thinking, spirituality has, unfortunately, been equated with a certain temper or disposition of mind almost the direct antithesis of the above. It has come to mean that capacity in which man truly and sincerely appreciates, and has learned to love, the ideal values of this human life. Perhaps, in this regard, an especial emphasis has been placed upon the possession of a certain ethical sensitiveness, ethical penetration and a deep sense of moral responsibility, all of which must surely be acknowledged as necessary features of a true Christian life. At the same time, it cannot be successfully denied that this very view has always tended to annul the most distinctive feature of Christian faith, and has obscured the pertinent challenge of Christianity itself. This is due to the fact that it has established the criterion of evaluation of that which is spiritual upon a universal basis, that is, upon a basis common to all religions alike, and shared also by philosophies, ethics, and the various humanities and arts. And accordingly, such a view fails completely to specify what was the essential constitutive thought, when traditional piety or the Early Church was compelled to speak of *spiritual life*, or of that which may be considered as its equivalent. Spiritual discernment for St. Paul meant an unique understanding, not so much of the truths about Christianity, as about the Truth apprehended alone by Christian faith. Spiritual life, therefore, is that creative life which is the outcome of just such revelation and apprehension. It is that peculiar informing of the spirit-life of man which is the consequence of the judgment,

witness, and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Such life always centres in Christ and His redeeming work. Apart from the recognition of both the judgment and the mercy which are made manifest in the revelation of Christ, and as witnessed to by the Holy Ghost, spiritual life has neither meaning nor existence in a Christian sense. When we speak of *spirituality*, therefore, we should be concerned primarily with that direct apprehension of God, in which faith perceives God as judgment and mercy, in Jesus Christ. It means for the believer condemnation and acquittal, humiliation and exaltation, a penetrating and permanent sorrow for sin, and yet the profoundest gratitude and freedom, in which the man that was slain, and yet is alive forevermore. This is the deepest, the most central and determining element in the Christian life, and the basic creative principle upon which alone the union of Christian peoples becomes real and effective. It should be noted that the ethic of such spirituality, when rightly conceived, is far more sensitive, more personal, more fundamental, and more radical and challenging than any based upon conventional, naturalistic, or even idealistic bases. It is anchored in love, the love alone, however, which is God's, and which is shed abroad in the hearts of believing men by the Holy Ghost.

The consideration of the above fact permits me now to speak of two matters in a more personal way, in relation to which I believe the Union movement to have been defective.

- 1) Its advocates seem to have assumed that the growing difficulties in Christian life and in Christian work were almost entirely of local conditioning and cause.

It is true that new countries with growing populations, consisting of distinctly different types of peoples, possessing quite different outlooks upon life, have usually very particular

difficulties to contend with in the prosecution of Christian work. The Home Mission task becomes a very responsible and exacting one for all the Churches in such lands. Social conditions, and diverse alien customs among such a complex of peoples, give rise to problems which are not known to older countries in which the population is more stable in its different parts, and more homogeneous as a whole. Such difficulties undoubtedly existed in Canada, and constituted a very real responsibility for the Churches; but I cannot believe that the just recognition, and estimation of the importance of these, and other similar difficulties, made imperative a union of the Churches, without at the same time having particular regard first to considerations even more vital and serious for the Church. The plain truth would seem to have been that the Churches in Canada were finding themselves more and more in the same predicament which has been common to the Protestant Churches of the world during the last thirty or forty years. There has been apparent in Protestant Christianity, particularly during the last generation, a rapid decline of vital interest in religion, and in Churches generally. The labouring man and the artisan class, it is well known, have to all intents and purposes abandoned the Christian Church. Other classes of the people have been similarly disaffected in their relation to the Church, although not, perhaps, in such wholesale fashion. As we perceive now, Church interests in Protestant countries in the 19th century had been monopolized by what is known as the middle classes. As a consequence, religious life became increasingly conventional and external. The Church, more and more, became dependent upon one class – in the more recent years particularly, upon the wealthier members of that class, who, it is now perceived, have often acquired their sometimes excessive, even

fabulous wealth, by virtue of a purely individualistic economic system. And it is this system which is being assailed from every side today, as a system purely selfish in motive, and designed to serve and protect the privileges of this one particular class of people. The argument that the Church is dependent upon, and linked up with, the Capitalistic system is not essentially true, if we are to think of the Church as consisting of a great host of humble people who are endeavouring, as best they can, to trust and serve God. But if we are to think of the Church in terms of its financial supports, in terms of those who would, and often do, guide its policies, there is not a little to be said in support of such an argument. There are doubtless many wealthy men who are humble and grateful believers in Jesus Christ, and who support the Church because of that fact alone, but the gospel preached in our modern Churches has evidently not been radical, or better, spiritual enough, to prevent a multitude of people from believing that the Church is patronized by men of finance and by men of so-called social prestige.

At any rate, so evident has been the rapid decline of interest in things religious that many of the finer minds among scholars and church leaders (and I speak here of those within Protestantism itself) believe that Protestant Christianity is veritably standing at the cross-roads at this present time. Roman Catholic scholars are confident that Protestant Christianity is in the process of dissolution, and seem to take a kind of unholy pleasure in believing that the judgment of God is upon it at last. These men contemplate its early break-up, and therefore interpret this present urgency for union among the various sects of Protestantism (as they delight to denominate Protestant Churches) as a sign that Protestantism, at last, conscious in some measure of its inherent radical weakness, is grasping

at straws to save a hopeless situation, or to avoid as long as possible complete disintegration. The real ailment of Protestantism they attribute to the fact that modern Protestantism has actually dissolved revelation, and thus undermined all authority, and this owing to the fact that, having departed, in the earlier period, from the true Church of God, it possesses no real credentials, no authentic commission, and, in modern times, no longer even an apparent Christian evangel.

Within Protestantism itself there have been many in the last generation or so, who, absorbed in purely modern thought and practical and secular endeavour, have attributed this decline of interest in the things of the Church to a very different cause. Their view has been tantamount to the claim that the Church's message has been too traditional in character, too much occupied with ancient history, creeds, dogmas and theology, to attract the modern man. Accordingly, in modern days, Protestant preaching has been addressed largely to present day problems and the Gospel has been accommodated to our practical and humanitarian problems, rather than to our eternal needs. Thus topical preaching has taken the place of strictly Biblical preaching, but alas! from this procedure no change for the better has been apparent. We have had, as a consequence, a succession of rather different emphases during the last few decades with a view to creating the necessary interest in the Church, and in Christianity. There has been the demand for a "social gospel," an enthusiasm for "religious education" with an almost naive faith in it, and perhaps more recently an emphasis on "an appropriate ritual, dignified worship, and ecclesiastical architecture." We have been expected to believe at times that if we could but manage to arrange that the altar be in the centre, and the pulpit at the side of the church, that would make a distinct difference in the spiritual

nature of our worship, and induce people to attend Church services. How pathetic it has all been! These considerations doubtless have some importance, but who will not admit that they are of secondary importance, and even then strictly dependent for any reality they may possess upon a more fundamental consideration? We shall have to learn, again, to perceive and to understand the strange revelation of, and witness to, God, which exists in the Christian Bible itself, bow anew before its absolute challenge, and, under constraint of that, go out and preach; and the world will doubtless begin to believe that Christianity is alive again. I do not believe that the Roman Catholic diagnosis of the Protestant ailment is the correct one, but the modern remedy has been rather a fiasco. Modern Christianity has a variety of interesting messages and helpful teachings, but no sufficient gospel for its own age. It is becoming a very real question whether the whole contemporaneous religious outlook, by which our modern Churches have been largely determined in their message and methods, is to be accounted essentially Christian. And in this respect, the Roman Catholic charge would seem to have some pertinence. But I cannot pretend to consider here, in any serious way, a matter so important.

I, at any rate, believed in 1925 that the United Church, with all its pretensions, would in the future do no more than accentuate such religious and ecclesiastic emphases as already existed, and I thought that the Presbyterian Church, through a new dependence upon God because of its difficulties and weakness, might return to a simpler, stronger and more evangelical preaching. I felt that such fellowship as this kind of preaching might engender would be more congenial, inasmuch as it would be based upon something which particularly appealed to me in the Christian faith.

I regret that I am compelled to confess that I am not at all certain as yet if that hope is to be realized in the Presbyterian Church. We seem to have continued after the disruption as if nothing very radical had happened to us, as if indeed we had possessed no really fundamental reason for parting as we did from our brethren. Nearly all the old abuses exist today, if indeed, these are not accentuated. Apart altogether from the purely religious conditions of our Church life, we have unfortunately fallen into the habit, in some important respects, of disregarding the basic laws and principles which essentially govern a Presbyterian Church, and in the absence of which a Church is not Presbyterian at all. Administration boards, other boards, committees and commissions have tended either to usurp Assembly powers, on the one hand, or to disregard Assembly actions, on the other, all of which seriously menaces the whole constitution of the Church, and tends to destroy the necessary central authority by which a Church may operate at all. It is to be confessed, perhaps, that it is really the result of that supreme and historic action taken by those opposed to Union, before that event had taken place, in which Presbyterians felt compelled to take a course in opposition to the decision of the majority of the Assembly. It is a matter, therefore, which requires our most serious consideration. There is indeed just ground for the question sometimes asked, whether, despite all protestations to the contrary, there has ever been a branch of the Presbyterian Church quite so essentially un-Presbyterian in method and in motive.

At the same time, I believe that what our people stood for in 1925 represented a conception of Christianity, the constitutive principle of which was essentially different from that of those who went into the United Church. And I am certain that, if there can be but an increasing number of students

going forth from this College and the sister College of the Church, who are devoted to that which is essentially Presbyterian, who, indeed, find themselves in possession of a gospel which puts them personally under compulsion to preach, and are therefore not overly concerned as to the kind of place in which their Church calls them to serve, the Presbyterian Church need have no fear as to the distinct and important place it will assuredly have in the religious life of this country.

- 2) Therefore, let me say that the real need of the Churches at present is not primarily one for unions, as these might be achieved here and there, but for a deeper and more real religious life in each Church.

For some reason, we have today come to the surface in things religious. Most of us are conscious of that fact. We lack strong, virile, compelling religious convictions. And the seemingly hopeless part of it all lies in the fact that we cannot do anything about it – that is, we cannot create convictions of ourselves, and, in fact, we should never attempt to do so. To come back, however, to reasons for refusing to enter Union, for this greater and more difficult problem cannot be discussed here. One's luke-warm attitude to the whole Union movement might be explained most simply and most honestly by expressing that feeling which prevailed in his mind at the time. Whether it was my personal fault or not, I cannot say, but there was nothing in this whole Union movement which really gripped my soul in a truly challenging religious way. That is to say, there was nothing that I either wanted to evade, or that I was compelled to accept. Nothing, for instance, which tended to challenge a man at the very roots of his spiritual being, as, for instance, a sincere reading of Karl

Barth undoubtedly does. There was nothing in it which, for me, promised any release from the Church's real *perplexity* in this day.

We have been surfeited with talk about religious interests and Christian enterprises in these latter days, about the various ideas of God, and the problem of Christ, and the problems of morality and religion, and the possibility of the immortality of the soul, but all have been treated from a purely objective standpoint. So easy is it to consider these infinite and overwhelming magnitudes – if we pause to think of what they mean – as so many interesting ideas in our human minds; so difficult to allow our souls to be confronted by their soul-shaking challenge and significance for our own personal lives. An old and esteemed friend of mine, at present a minister in the United Church, said to me only a few days ago, "We ministers in the Church, when we speak of God, will have to learn again to *mean* God." I wonder, in so saying, if he has not really penetrated to the heart of the Church's trouble in modern times.

Chapter 7
Part Three

PRESENT PROSPECTS FOR UNITY (OR REUNION)

PROPERTY OF
FOR ONLY
(OR RETURNED)

RELIGIOUS UNITIES: PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN

This whole question of the union of Christian Churches is a much more complex and intricate problem than was generally supposed by those in Canada, who, during the years of which we have been speaking, were particularly interested in the practical benefits which might result from such a union. A well-known modern philosopher and secular historian is perhaps not far from the truth when he has suggested in a recent book⁴ that Christianity is not likely ever to attain the unity which other religions have achieved, owing to its greater qualitative richness of life and thought, and especially, owing to its having always possessed an especially moral or ethical governing motive. "This diversity," he writes, "has been its (Christianity's) chief source of weakness: it explains why Christianity has never been able to make society in its image, nor to stamp a permanent character upon civilization, like Islam; but this has also been its chief strength, in that, from its conflicting elements have come flexibility, adaptation, and what is far more important, the possibility of moral progress. The fact that the West has never crystallized into the stable

⁴ Prof. Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind* (p. 38).

societies of India or China, however great their achievements in themselves, must be in large part attributed to the essential nature of its moral tradition." I would infer that Prof. Randall, in making the above claim, is particularly interested in the relations which exist between religions and those secular orders, or civilizations, of which they are part, and of which, sometimes indeed, they constitute essentially the creative sources. For it is a well-known fact that within Muhammadanism and Hinduism, when considered strictly as religious systems, there have been quite as many divisions as there exist within Christianity itself. And yet, curiously enough, the former have consistently maintained their original first-principles and characteristic world-views, in a way that Christianity, especially since the monistic idealistic philosophy of life has become so all-prevalent in Protestantism, has not been able to do. These religions have imposed their nature upon the secular outlook in a manner in which the more individualistic, sensitive, and responsively ethical nature of Christianity has not permitted that religion to do. In the early stages, the rigid unity of Muhammadanism was largely due to the fact that it was convinced that it possessed an infallible and verbally inspired sacred Scripture as an absolute guide in life, namely, the *Koran*. The early disciples of the "Prophet" indeed far surpassed even our modern Christian Fundamentalists in laying claim to an absolute and unique sacred Book. The *Koran* was to them a veritable transcript of *the* Book in heaven. In the later stages, the fact that Muhammadanism had become a political and military force, with the characteristic interests attendant upon such, together with the further fact that its rigid monotheism did not lend itself, as Christian monotheism did, to subtle theological differences, helped to maintain the unity of that religion and its

corresponding civilization. In the case of the Indian system, there has also been a persisting unity, and this, despite a bewildering diversity of religious forms and expressions. Here, however, it is the result of a totally different cause, namely, an all-inclusive and all-comprehensive pessimistic ground-view of life, which has not essentially changed from the earlier Brahmanistic times to our present day, although in that intervening period it has assumed a very great variety of external forms and religious interpretations. A notable feature is to be seen in the fact that the various divisions discovered in these pagan religions have seldom been occasioned, as has often been the case in Christianity, by differences of a purely ecclesiastical character.

It will be generally conceded, I believe, that within Christianity itself, the Roman Catholic Church has attained a certain definable unity, which is conspicuous by its absence from the more individualistic Christianity represented by the Protestant Church. The Greek Catholic Church, it is true, possesses a unity; but for many centuries now that Church has been a negligible factor in Christian life and activity. It has represented the unity of a rigidly established institution, linked up with the State; for practical intents and purposes a department of the State, in which symbolism and what it stands for in religion has completely subordinated both the zeal for truth and the zest for missionary activity – a unity of death, some would contend. In the Roman Catholic Church, there have been, in fact, as many types of faith as there are to be found in Protestantism; but that Church has maintained throughout the centuries a unity of motive, thought and action, altogether foreign to Protestantism. That unity, viewed from the historic standpoint, is one which has been gradually conditioned by a series of historic circumstances and events

which have issued in the conviction that the Roman Church, primarily established by God, is the one custodian of divine truth and the sole ark of salvation. This unity centres essentially in a sacramentarian system, which claims to have peculiar efficacy for the salvation of men's souls, and to be, moreover, finally instrumental in the determination of their ultimate destinies. The Roman Catholic hierarchy has thus been able, despite manifold other differences within its jurisdiction, to impose a unity upon the membership of that Church of a character not to be found elsewhere in Christianity, or indeed in any other religion. And it should be observed here that it is very doubtful if, apart from this central sacramentarian emphasis, any Christian Church or group of Churches can ever hope to attain a unity of this particular Catholic type. One sometimes receives the impression from those more truly "Catholic" thinkers in the United Church of Canada that they are not unaware of this fact, and are quietly governing themselves in accordance with the conviction that it would be a good thing if sacramentarianism would become vital in Protestantism again. But, for most Protestants, the unity exhibited in the Roman Catholic Church represents an advantage purchased at too great a price. In fact, the very shrewdest minds among Protestant thinkers are convinced that it is a unity which is not essentially Christian.

This consideration of the various unities which have existed among religions and Churches will, at least, serve to shew that unity possesses a great variety of meanings when applied to religion, that it is, moreover, the result of various conditions and diverse causes, and, furthermore, that it represents many different qualities and degrees of attainment. It is an undeniable fact that there has been in recent years a distinct tendency, in certain quarters, toward a union of the

Churches; but, at the same time, in view of even more vital and virile tendencies which are at present questioning the governing principle of our whole modern interpretation of Christianity, there would seem to be apparent also a powerful divisive force which is likely to cut laterally across the older lines of demarcation. Could we see below the surface of our religious life, we would doubtless be able to discern realignments in process at this very moment, which are motivated by vital theological, rather than mere ecclesiastical, understandings of the Christian faith.

You, who have been applying yourselves to the modern subject, the Philosophy of Religion, may recall that it has become a recognized maxim for that scientific study, that there operates in nature, indeed in all realms of life, including religion, a so-called *double-law*; a law which, on the one hand, operates toward unity, and on the other, works toward individuation. "There is, indeed," as one writer puts it, "a force in the universe working for an ever richer and more inclusive unity, integration, co-ordination, making for a totality in which all individuals shall become part of a harmonious whole. But side by side with that tendency, as part of the same cosmic process, there is a tendency making for greater individuation, fashioning personalities with an inner life of their own, marked by an ever increasing intensity and fullness." This, of course, is a conception drawn from the present idealistic philosophy and based upon an evolutionary view of revelation. Whether or not it can be applied legitimately to revelation as conceived traditionally by historic Christianity, it certainly is pertinent to the development of religions as these progress from their primitive *tribal-group* forms to the higher *national* unities, until, owing to an emerging ethical sensitiveness and consciousness on the part of individual men,

these issue, or tend to issue, in that still higher *ethical* unity, which conditions and characterizes the *universal* religion, and in which some form of monism or monotheism has become the distinguishing feature. If it may be assumed that, in some important respects, this same law operates in the Christian religion itself, and there is every reason to believe that it does, although not in any absolute way, and if, furthermore, the law may be considered applicable to those various unities and dis-integrations which have occurred in the course of Christian history, then I believe that two considerations of importance must become clear to us, namely: 1) that Protestants can never be expected to become satisfied again with a form of Christian, or rather, ecclesiastical unity, which constituted in the beginning of their history that very thing against which they were compelled to protest, and finally were constrained to abandon for good; 2) that any form of unity today which does not indicate an advance upon, or, perhaps, is inferior to, that which already exists, must inevitably retard rather than advance the interests of a union of the various Churches.

The strength of the unity in Roman Catholicism lies in the fact that it is centred in the Christian conception of the unique redemption wrought by Jesus Christ in His reconciling and atoning sacrifice, and therefore, it tends to produce a certain type of *spiritual* life. Its weakness is to be discovered in the equally important fact that the whole process of this salvation is too externally conceived, and too exclusively appropriated by a visible institution which claims to be the sole instrument of man's salvation. In other words, it does not make sufficient room for that individuation which is imperative for Christian life and faith; that is, if Christian people are to attain that *highest of all unities* in which Christian personalities under the impelling constraint of the Holy Spirit find themselves

though in other respects often sharply differentiated, one in Jesus Christ. Unities, which are based on practical, humanitarian, intellectual, or even highly ethical considerations and appreciations, come far short of this spiritual unity to be found in Christ. Indeed, such are to be placed in a different category entirely. The many modern unities so attractive to the human mind, and so profuse in variety, issue largely from the higher human interests, emotional, intellectual, ethical and aesthetic, and represent mainly common appreciations of man's powers and sensibilities. Those people of like sensibilities and interests are drawn together simply by the higher common interests of this life. But spiritual unity is the product of an attitude of mind, or soul, in which man finds himself in utter dependence upon God, and thus in possession of a life unique, which is the gift of God. Man partakes of this life alone through the faith, in which he believes God has met his absolute need in Jesus Christ, and especially in His atoning work. The Roman Catholic Church witnesses to this all-important fact. But this Church presumes to *compel* belief in this regard, in fact, to control the Spirit of God, and, accordingly, achieves a unity which is external and static. True spiritual life, however, issues from personal perception and individual choice, which are free and responsible, and yet which, at the same time, are under constraint of the Holy Spirit. Those people so constrained *discover*, so to speak, their oneness in Jesus Christ, and this constitutes the true unity, the true catholicity, of the Church of God in Jesus Christ. It is a unity independent of all forms and expressions, but it always presupposes a faith, which at once implies a theology and is apprehended and sustained by such. *This is what I conceive to be central to the whole problem of unity among the Churches.* We may aim at and achieve a certain uniformity in worship,

action and belief; but unity *is*, or *is not*. It may exist in the presence of manifold differences, even although believing men are not always conscious of that fact, but one thing is certain, it is never *created by man*. Now I am quite aware that most ecclesiastically-minded Christians, on the one hand, and most practically-minded Christians, on the other, believe the above explanation of the unity of the Church to be quite an inadequate one. Each group, in its own way, considers such explanation to be too ideal for the conditions that actually constitute human life. The Churchman is concerned about schism. He considers it to be the most heinous of sins, but he understands the schismatic as the man who has chosen to separate from the true Church, meaning always by the true Church, something *institutional* as well as spiritual. He therefore deplores the divisions in the Church. I think I ought to admit here, that the present divisions in the Church, though always to be greatly deplored, have never caused the dismay in my mind, which is so apparent in the minds of so many others today. And perhaps this is to be attributed to the fact that I have always believed that any conception of schism based upon purely ecclesiastical or sacramentarian grounds is false – an evasion of the real problem. The importance of this problem, however, permits me to introduce you to another grave difficulty which confronts those who seek a union, or a reunion, of the various Churches of Christ.

UNION AS BETWEEN EPISCOPAL AND NON-EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

I suppose almost everybody will agree that the Church of Christ must, here on earth, organize itself into a body, i.e., must assume some visible form. The Church of Christ, from

the very beginning, has done so. The difficulty lies in the fact that it has assumed many forms, and has acquired a variety of institutional rites and customs. The importance which is to be attached to what is known as the *visible Church*, in contrast with the *invisible Church*, has therefore become of paramount importance when anything in the nature of a union of Churches is contemplated. What, for instance, distinguishes a Churchman of the Church of England from a Free Churchman save a difference of emphasis just at this particular point? That is to say, whereas the Free Churchman believes the constitutive factor of a true Church to be fundamentally a matter of certain *requirements of faith alone*, an Anglican Churchman, especially if he be of the high-ecclesiastical type, believes the constitutive factor to consist of certain requirements of faith, but in addition there are also *requirements of order*, and he would seem to place the chief emphasis upon the latter. In the words of Dr. Temple, Archbishop of York, and according to his view, in any true conception of the Church, "church order is to be accepted as a thing given, as distinct from a thing to be constructed."⁵ A particular "Order" becomes, in such a view, an essential in the true Church. The episcopal order, in the opinion of Dr. Temple, is a necessity for the true Church, not only because that order can claim to be "historic in the sense in which no other can now ever hope to be" (p. 96), but because it is an order which has been *given* by God, that is, has alone been authorized by the Universal Church, and therefore embodies within itself that regular ministry which possesses the *right* (the only sanction from the whole Universal Church) to administer the "true" sacraments,

⁵ "Thoughts on Some Problems of Today," (p. 117) (193) Wm. Temple.

which true sacraments we shall also see are, in his view, to be considered absolutely essential to the true Church. The Church is not only a *spiritual* fellowship, it is also a *sacramental* fellowship. In fact, Dr. Temple writes, "it (the Church) is fundamentally and essentially a sacramental organism" (p. 105). This Churchman perceives clearly enough that that which separates the Free Churches from the Church of England is fundamentally a difference in the significance which in these respective Churches is attached to the Sacraments. Writing in regard to this matter, he says: "This seems to point to a divergence of view so deeply ingrained as to be quite spontaneous between our respective conceptions of the place of sacraments in the life of the Church, and therefore also of their place in the life of individual members of the Church" (p. 100). The little book from which I have been quoting (published in the form of a Visitation charge) is primarily and essentially an explanation of the weighty ecclesiastical, and other more practical, conclusions arrived at during the deliberations of the Lambeth councils of 1921 and 1930. It is significant, not only from the fact that we find in it Dr. Temple's interpretations of these conclusions, but because his views undoubtedly represent the present official view of the Church of England on matters pertaining to the possibilities of the reunion of the Christian Churches.

I have always found the writings of Dr. Temple among the most challenging and illuminating of those of modern religious writers. He is always candid and gives every evidence of sincerely endeavouring to understand and appreciate claims, religious and ecclesiastic, different from his own. In this book, moreover, he has put his position so clearly, and so forcibly in certain respects, that its contentions cannot but give cause for serious thought on the part of all Free Churchmen. For these

very reasons, the book is the more arresting, and indeed significant, since it reveals how very distant would appear to be the prospects for union between episcopal and non-episcopal churches, that is, if the present ecclesiastical outlooks of these respective bodies of Christians (in one case or the other, or in both cases) are not to be radically and fundamentally changed in the near future.

The Anglican Church, in recent times, has been assuming the role of a sort of divinely appointed mediator between Catholicism, on the one hand, and Protestantism, on the other. Unfortunately, in my opinion, that Church has been overmuch encouraged even by non-episcopal Churches to assume just such a role. It would not be unjust to claim that for some time the Church of England has been posing as the Church zealous, above all others, for reunion, and in a peculiar way, divinely appointed to effectuate such reunion. But to many, the reunion it seeks would seem to be one on terms of its own choosing. For Free Churchmen, such terms would really mean absolute submission on their part. Curiously enough, too, the Church of England has found the specific papal claims of the Roman Catholic Church an obstacle to union with that Church, a fact which to outsiders would scarcely seem to be warranted, especially if we are to view the objection made in the light of those peculiar claims it makes for itself, and which it has directly inherited from the Roman Catholic Church. It is an open question, at any rate, whether the Papacy is not the logical outcome of the system shared by both Churches.

Furthermore, it is to be noted that the Church of England has constantly prided itself on its composite character and has counted that indeed a peculiar virtue. It has also claimed that its unique position and its peculiar character have been, from

the historic point of view, an evidence of a specific guidance on the part of the Holy Spirit. Outsiders, however, have accounted this composite character not as an achievement on the part of that Church, but as an historic necessity, indeed, at times, as the consequence of a spirit of compromise which has become almost chronic. And students of English history cannot be forgetful of the fact that this peculiar claim to the Holy Spirit's guidance, on the part of the leaders of the Church of England, is a rather belated conviction among them. (It is a specific example surely, of that to which I referred in my introduction, of man's claiming as a virtue, or rather, as a sign of the special favour or approval of Providence, some apparent good, in which it has pleased God to overrule human weakness and sin for something more in accord with His own purpose and wisdom.) These scholars recall also the Church of England's first approach to, and negotiations with, the Greek Catholic Church, and the reasons for this move on its part. They recall how elated, in those far distant days, was that Church in the discovery that it possessed establishments of an institutional kind common with that ancient Church, and which permitted the Anglican Church to fortify itself in its then growing assumption that its real roots were to be found not in the Roman, but in the Ancient Catholic Church. It has always been a source of wonder to many Free Church scholars that the Church of England today can find a kinship with the Greek Church, on the basis of a common episcopal inheritance alone, more close than it believes it possesses with non-conformist brethren of its own land. Especially has it been difficult to understand, if an historic, and a present, evidence of the grace and power of God obviously manifested is to be considered the prime criterion of any true fellowship in Christ.

At all events, Dr. Temple contends that in any contemplated reunion of the Churches it must be understood as a basis of negotiation that each and every Church involved must be permitted to retain its distinctive contribution to the historic and Universal Church, and that each Church is to be permitted to decide for itself what that contribution has been. In the case of the Church of England, he makes plain that its distinctive contribution must be recognized as the historic Episcopacy, considered as an *essential*, and therefore, as manifesting that particular significance for sacraments, ordination rites, etc., which has always characterized the so-called high-church view. To a Free Churchman, of course, such a claim is tantamount to having settled the argument before it has really begun. Everything which really matters has been prejudged in such a proposal. Dr. Temple is prepared to acknowledge, strangely enough, that the Free Churches have given evidence of a quality of Christian life and faith, perhaps, in many instances, superior to anything which his own Church can shew. He would appear to imply that the Free Churches as a whole have manifested a presence of the Grace of God in a manner which the Church of England, considered as a whole, has not been permitted to do. And yet he is confident that that fact is not the all-important consideration. "Certainly unspiritual members of the Church," he writes, "are less pleasing to God than detached and isolated saints; yet it remains true that the Church matters more than a company of holy individuals, for in the completeness of the Scriptures, Creeds, Sacraments and Order, it gives fuller witness, and holds the promise of greater achievement." He acknowledges, moreover, that there has been an undoubted evidence of a true efficacy in the "Orders" of other Christian bodies, nevertheless these, he assumes, are to be considered as in some sense "corrupt," at

least, as "defective" or "irregular," and this owing to the fact that they do not possess the authority and sanction of the Universal Church. The true succession in these Churches is not clear, or has been entirely lost. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Lutheran Church he considers, of non-episcopal Churches, to be most nearly regular. One might point out in passing that, on such a view, the Presbyterian Church in Canada has surely conferred a signal benefit upon its Methodist and Congregational brethren, when a section of that Church has deemed fit to mix its ecclesiastical blood with that of these less favoured peoples by entering the union which has taken place in this country.

There is, however, no need to dwell on the matter further. It all goes to shew how difficult will be any reunion of episcopal and non-episcopal Churches, and how groundless has been that superficial optimism which has characterized so much of the discussion concerning Church Union in this country. If "to be ignorant is bliss," that is no valid excuse for the vanity which so often characterizes such ignorance. Were it possible to believe that Anglicans might in the future consider the episcopal problem mainly from a constitutional standpoint, there would be many Presbyterians, I venture to believe, who could approach them with high hopes of a complete understanding. In view of all the uncertainties, indecision, and, shall I say, the unspiritual nature of much that attends the Presbyterian form of government, and especially its unsatisfactory "calling" system under present conditions, I personally could contemplate a certain form of episcopacy with not a little pleasure. John Knox, you will remember, in his later years, was not altogether disinclined to consider the merits of Episcopacy, and it is not mere fancy to suggest that, had it not been for particularly untoward circumstances in the

earlier days of the Reformation in Scotland, there might have been established there a permanent form of episcopal government. But at the same time, one feels, if the possibility of reunion between these Churches is to be made to hinge entirely on the regularity of Presbyterian orders, that reunion cannot be considered a matter of immediate concern at all.

Presbyterians, if they are to be true to their traditions and to their essential understanding of the Christian faith, must continue to possess a very exalted view of the Church. It is truly for them, the "Body of Christ" – if such metaphor is not interpreted as a bald fact – the "Fellowship of the Saints," the Creation of God's Holy Spirit, and is radically different from all human organizations, human brotherhoods, etc., even when these are inspired by ethical and humanitarian motives. The Church, moreover, in a vitally true sense, is to be considered the only custodian of the Spirit and the "Ark of Salvation," but such Church must never be made merely co-extensive with a particular institution, or co-determinous with that institution's privileges, claims and powers. No one has put greater emphasis on the unique *reality* and divine *significance* of the Church than has John Calvin. He was the true High Churchman in contrast with the high-ecclesiastic. And we are not yet true Presbyterians, let me affirm, if we do not profoundly understand what Calvin was striving for, and insisting upon, in this regard. The Congregationalists and Methodists, speaking in a general way, have historically had no such sense of the real significance of the Church as Presbyterians have possessed. Nor, I would venture to suggest, has the United Church of Canada today, considering it as a whole, any such sense at all of that peculiar nature and significance of the Church which is traditionally an essential part of Presbyterian belief. In this respect, we are more akin to

Anglicans than we are to any of the non-conforming bodies. But even here we seem to possess, nevertheless, not only a different form, but a significantly different view, on last analysis, of the true character of Orders from that possessed by that great Church.

At the consummation of the union of the two great branches of the Scottish Church in 1929, Lord Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England, gave utterance to words of the very greatest significance. In referring to the relations which actually exist, and which might yet exist, between his Church and the Roman Catholic Church, he is reported to have said: "We have never ceased to make it clear that we can enter no portal of fellowship which has submission graven on its lintel – submission to what would be unendurable, because it is untrue." One has often wondered if there were not Free Churchmen present in St. Giles Cathedral that day to whom it must have occurred that, in the utterance of the above words, the Primate of England had also precisely defined the character of that stumbling block which existed between the Church he officially represented and the Church to which he was speaking on that memorable occasion.

Chapter 8

UNITY AND THEOLOGY

I have but one other matter to bring before you, and I shall give to it the attention it would seem to require, as part of the concluding remarks which I wish to make on this theme. It has to do with that which has chiefly motivated my thought throughout these addresses, while I have been endeavouring to tell you why I am a Presbyterian.

I may say that I am firmly convinced that no satisfactory or widespread union is likely to take place among so-called non-episcopal Churches until the peoples, and especially the leaders of such Churches, have acquired again a renewed spiritual sensitiveness, and therefore a vital theological consciousness. Furthermore, I am strongly inclined to believe that such difficulties as we have seen to exist between episcopal and non-episcopal churches (and which apparently at the present time prohibit any kind of union among such Churches) will find their solution, if anywhere, in the same place, that is, through a rejuvenated spiritual and theological interest. A new consciousness of the reality of God, a reinvigorated sensitiveness to the *absolute* need of man, a more profound apprehension of the significance of Christ's atoning work and of the reality of the witness in man's soul of the Holy Spirit – such, more than anything else, will serve to place first things first in men's thought, and will enable them,

with a more discerning understanding, to appreciate those contentions for which others who oppose them stand. The order of advance in spiritual understanding, is faith and experience, first, the inevitable theological interpretation of the same, second, and necessary ecclesiastical requirements, third. So, at least, it was in the beginning; and one would surmise that it is ever likely to be, in any revival of Christianity. And, fortunately for us, we seem to be living in a day when this process is at work again.

Many people, growing dissatisfied with the slightly veiled naturalistic interpretation of Christianity which has prevailed in recent years, have in their own personal experiences been driven back upon God as not before, and have been discovering from such experiences a strangely new confidence in Christianity. The remarkable thing about it is to be seen in the fact that this experience seems to have been taking place in diverse quarters of Christendom; and, it would appear that between the peoples so affected, no direct influence can be traced. Something even more subtle and real than the ordinary external influences which are to be perceived in life has been at work. A new sense of the reality and presence of God has been felt. As a consequence, challenging theologies are being born, which, though so difficult, and at times so abstruse, that scholars are obliged to labour in order to obtain a right understanding of them, yet "babes and sucklings," as it were, seem to possess a real sense of their significance and challenge, for themselves personally, and for this age. There are movements in the hearts of those who wait and pray, that is to say, in the hearts of those who by circumstances have literally been compelled to put their trust in *God*, which never appear in the hearts of worldly, prayerless men. Indeed our busy person in religious activities, even our highly

respectable moralist may know little or nothing about those strange influences which quicken and impel the souls of men who possess this kind of faith. To such people, at any rate, theology always becomes an exceedingly important matter, and Christian fellowship constitutes a great and precious reality – a veritable gift of God.

These are not the people who are likely to oppose any feasible union of the Churches, since they know, as others do not, that this fellowship in God is confined to no particular Church. No more are they the people who are likely to be insensitive to men's forebodings, fears and cares in the exigencies of ordinary life, to disregard their poverty and want. Still less are these the people who will fail in a sense of, and passion for, justice, who will be destitute of the higher virtues, in a day when heroic and self-sacrificing courage is needed to confront vested interests and powerful classes in the name of humanity and God. Sometimes one would get the impression that these so-called practical affairs are the concerns of the United Church alone, among the Churches of this land. But, an intense interest in theology, and a true apprehension of its significance, does not make a man immune to the challenge of life's concrete perplexities, but rather the reverse. To appreciate the real difficulties in the way of a union of the Churches does not prevent a man desiring it with all his heart. And we may be assured, therefore, that a reunion of the Churches in Christ will not eventuate by simply considering meticulously its "possibility and desirability" from this external or practical point of view, but rather by discovering again the very reality of God and His Truth in Jesus Christ. And so this leads me to consider finally the relation of theology to such unions as have been proposed or effected in the past in this country.

Professor John T. McNeill, professor of Church History in this College in the days preceding the disruption of our Church in 1925, has written as you may be aware, two books, namely, *The Presbyterian Church in Canada* and *Unitive Protestantism*. In both of these, his well-known Union sentiments find clear and, at times, rather forcible expression.

In the first of these books he gives particular consideration to those Unions which have been achieved within the different Christian communions in the history of the religious life in Canada. He leaves the impression that from those very early days of Canadian religious life, when the peoples of the various Churches in this land found themselves separated from those particular causes which had given rise to the divisions which existed in the lands of their birth, or of their fathers, there was a more or less gradual gravitation toward Union, until, at a time a little after the middle of last century, the movement in that direction was so greatly accelerated, in all the larger Christian groups in Canada, as to result in the various larger Christian bodies absorbing other bodies of a like kind. And the purport of the book would seem to suggest that this remarkable trend toward Union was in some sense motivated by a national characteristic, for he writes:

"Nothing has been more characteristic of Canadian life, religious and political, than the trend toward Union. In the course of sixteen years, 1860-1875 inclusive, these eight churches (Presbyterian bodies) were progressively drawn together into one. Within this period took place the confederation of the four original provinces of the Dominion (1867) and the addition of three others. All the great religious bodies of Canada have taken their present shape as a result of a series of acts of union, and

these have occurred with such measured sequence and regularity as to illustrate a national tendency" (p. 17).

Furthermore, in pursuit of his theme, Dr. McNeill would appear to desire us to infer that the final consummation of union of the three large bodies in 1925 can be considered but the natural sequel to this national characteristic.

Apart, however, from the important question as to whether national motives and tendencies should ever take precedence over other considerations in ecclesiastical realms, he fails to point out that the very earliest unions effected in Canadian Presbyterian circles were made possible, strictly, by a recognition on the part of the parties concerned that the Westminster Confession of Faith was to constitute the common doctrinal understanding of their Christian faith. Moreover, even in the case of the Presbyterian Union consummated in 1875, although at that time it was recognized that certain injunctions embodied in the above Confession possessed no relevance to the situation as it existed in Canada, it can be stated with every confidence that such union could never have been effected except for the implicit understanding on the part of all parties that there was a genuine theological agreement among them, i.e., that the theology expressed in their common subordinate standard was vital, and essentially true, and constituted the theology which represented their views of Christianity. Any minimizing of the theological emphasis, in view of other considerations, would have been fatal to the effectuation of the Union of 1875. Consequently, the union of the three churches in 1925 is scarcely to be considered a natural sequence of that trend toward union which led up to 1875.

In the other book, *Unitive Protestantism*, the same motive seems to determine Dr. McNeill's thought. He rightly contends here that John Calvin, in his later years, was a vigorous advo-

cate of union among the then Protestant Churches. Calvin was, as Dr. McNeill claims, a profound believer in Catholicity and one who detested schism. And, as he further argues, John Calvin strove for the "consolidation of Protestantism" (p. 180), was even concerned for the "visible unity of the Church of God," and "never lost hope that the several Protestant groups would yet realize that corporate unity which entered into his definition of the Catholic Church" (p. 185). All of this is a correct statement of the case. Calvin undoubtedly dreamed of a universal Protestantism and laboured hard on behalf of such a cause. But what inference is to be drawn? What particular lesson would Dr. McNeill have us learn in this apparent urgency with which he presents these union sentiments of Calvin? Is it that he would make this austere Reformed Churchman an object lesson for those who have followed in his train, so far as theology is concerned, and yet, who have given evidence of a failure to possess his union enthusiasm?

If such be the purpose of the author in this book, he has utterly failed, for Calvin was not a unionist at any price; indeed, he was a unionist only on one explicit condition. Union for Calvin was a possibility only on conditions which presupposed an uncompromising theological understanding of the true Gospel. Were Dr. McNeill not less historian and yet more theologian, he would have made more clear than he does the absolute condition underlying Calvin's view of Union. Calvin, as is well-known, would have no union with the Roman Catholic Church. Dr. McNeill seems to believe this to be a defect, a "negative" aspect in an otherwise admirable devotion. But it is to be remembered that Calvin's negative attitude here was wholly due to the fact that he was persuaded that Church did not preach the true doctrine. No more would he have anything to do with Humanists, Anabap-

tists or Mystics, and chiefly because in his opinion, they possessed no doctrine. A quotation from Calvin himself, which, curiously enough, Dr. McNeill employs, defines explicitly this Reformer's views concerning the Union of the Churches. "For I was fully conscious how great was the zeal with which I burned for the unity of the Church, provided only that the *truth*⁶ should be the bond of concord."

The real position of Calvin, in this regard, can be understood only if we recognize the fact that he could conceive of Union only on a basis of strict theological understanding and agreement. And it was just because there had been such a theological awakening among the major groups of Protestants at the time, who shared, amid minor differences, a conception of the supreme majesty and sovereignty of God – One who had manifested Himself to sinful men in Jesus Christ and in the witness of the Holy Spirit – that he laboured incessantly in his later days for a union of these Churches. So, you will perceive that the one condition of Union, which Calvin presupposes as basal, is precisely that which was given but scant courtesy by those who advocated Union in Canada in the years which have passed.

If, however, men can learn to discern again what John Calvin meant by *God* (that is, in his truly religious apprehension of God, before that apprehension is depleted by definitive thought; for Calvin, God was no mere name, no mere subjective experience or a necessary postulate of thought), more especially, if they can grasp what be meant by the *Word of God*, and above all, if they can reach those depths of self-understanding again in which the Protestant *justification by faith alone* becomes to them the veritable *Gospel* that

⁶Italics added by the author.

it is, Protestant peoples will have secured for themselves a substantial basis for a higher and more fruitful Christian unity than has been. But to recognize such things – to “desperately recognize” them, as has been said – will involve men in exacting, yea, in terrific theological implications.

But let me refer you to words of Barth, which have pertinence for this union problem in a general way, and painful pertinence for that problem as it was worked out in Canada a few years ago:

“Those who believe that the Reformed Churches should conduct themselves ‘as untheologically as possible’ delight in appealing to the practical unionizing tendencies of the old Reformed Churchmen, especially to the active, organizing world-embracing spirit of *Calvin*; but they constantly overlook the fact that Calvin wrote the *Institutes* before he wrote his much admired letters on church polity. In a word, he first had a *theme*, and *then* developed its variations, first he *knew* what he wanted, and *then* he wanted what he knew. The desire ‘with resolute determination’ to reverse this quite natural order, to begin where Calvin left off, to reap with him without having sown with him, is neither Calvinistic nor commendable....

“A will to unite cannot be developed by people who have not yet taken themselves, to say nothing of others, seriously; the peace of Christendom cannot be served by understandings that lack content.”

NOTE

Since completing the writing of the preceding addresses, my attention has been drawn to an arresting editorial in the

Toronto *Daily Star* of October 26, 1933, on the theme, "Eight Years of Church Union." This journal, as is well known, has been a strong advocate of Church Union, and has always revealed a sincere regard for those aims and motives which have consistently animated the United Church of Canada in recent years. So completely does the editorial substantiate the views concerning the United Church presented in the foregoing pages that I have thought it wise to include the editorial *in toto* in the form of a "Note" at this point. It will speak for itself and will serve to shew the United Church viewpoint from the inside:

Eight Years of Church Union

"Canadians may learn much about one of the features of their own national life by reading a book entitled 'Church Union in Canada,' written by Rev. Claris Edwin Silcox, who is associated with the Institute of Social and Religious Research, and produced in New York City. Mr. Silcox is a son of the late Rev. Dr. E.D. Silcox, for many years pastor of Zion Congregational Church, College Street. A review of this book by Mr. Albert C. Dieffenbach appeared in last week's issue of the *New Republic*, and the critic gives his opinion that the author is honest and candid and did his work admirably.

"Some of Mr. Dieffenbach's own observations may not go unchallenged by church people. He states that, 'The first thing one wishes to know about a church is what its creed, if any, is,' whereas Christian leaders are becoming increasingly concerned about conduct and the spirit that motivates men and women and less and less concerned about the doctrines to which people subscribe. As a consequence, modern church leaders

scarcely look upon articles of faith as matters of first importance. They sympathize with the view that what a man thinks is his own business, while his dealings with his fellows are of direct interest to society and particularly to the churches. The *raison d'être* of the churches, in this present-day view, is to develop a brotherliness in the world that is based upon recognition of the divinity as the universal father. With the increased latitude allowed to the individual in matters of faith under the influence of this view has come a growth of tolerance and kindliness that is great gain.

"Mr. Dieffenbach says that the United Church calls itself liberal and he admits that this means 'an emphasis on life rather than doctrinal exactitude.' But he seems to deplore the fact that the new church's statement of faith is 'a combination of John Calvin and John Wesley tempered by the weakly remonstrant and essentially orthodox Pilgrim Congregationalist — there is nothing later than the sixteenth century in the letter of the united faith,' and he concludes that, 'The whole practical truth is that doctrines in Canada, as in the United States, are in a kind of disrepute amazing to anyone who knows church history.' Mr. Dieffenbach would have given a clearer understanding of the reason for the adoption of the doctrinal basis of the union of the three Canadian churches if he had said that the basis was dictated by expedience rather than by prevailing theological views, and that those who put it together merely moved along the lines of least resistance. The difficulties in the way of union were formidable enough without attempting to re-state the Christian faith in modern terms. In each of the three churches were persons of advanced religious thought who refrained from insisting upon a simpler and

up-to-date creed because they were not prepared to accept responsibility for hindering a plan designed to conserve and make more effective the spiritual forces of the nation. They felt that this deliberate sacrifice of their own preferences did no violence to their consciences, having regard to all the circumstances, and the less so because of the degree of doctrinal freedom permitted to the membership.

"The book reviewer states that the manuscript of Mr. Silcox's book was read by representatives of the churches that entered union, which makes it hard to understand how the book could give the reviewer the impression that 'the union represents primarily an attempt at national solidarity.' We fancy that is an observation that few, if any, United Church leaders would care to endorse. Advocates of union always emphasized the point that the demand for union did not arise out of a craze for size, numbers or political power, but out of the hope and determination to make better headway with the colossal tasks of the church in a rapidly growing young country of vast dimensions."

No particular comment, on my part, would seem to be necessary, for it is apparent that the editor and myself stand poles apart in our respective views of the needs of modern Christianity. Only let me say that some years ago I could have subscribed very heartily to his view of the Church and of Christianity. Today, I find myself at complete variance with his whole position, and indeed with practically every specific contention he makes. Moreover, I cannot agree that the view he presents represents in any sense those profound and vigorous tendencies which are operating in the religious world at the present time. My sympathies are with Mr. Dieffenbach,

the critic – at least in the things which seem to astonish him – whose observations the editor feels must not be allowed to “go unchallenged by church people.” It is apparently Mr. Dieffenbach, and not the editor, who has felt the real pulse of the new religious life which is surging up in diverse places in this present day.

CONCLUSION

I am conscious of the fact that what I have been obliged to say in the foregoing pages has been very largely of a critical nature. In order to make clear my own view in regard to the union of the various Churches, it has been entirely necessary to scrutinize carefully the claims made by those leaders whose efforts have been largely instrumental in the formation of the United Church of Canada. In order, moreover, to see the whole problem in proper perspective, it has been likewise necessary to consider those very precise attitudes to re-union, so consistently assumed by both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches, more especially during recent years. I trust that such attitudes as have been adopted to these respective Churches, on my part, will not be interpreted as indicating any spirit of unfriendliness toward them. I am convinced, as a matter of fact, that the United Church of Canada is destined to have a very important role to play in the furtherance of religious life in this land. At the same time, I am equally confident that, as that Church's great task in the coming years presses more poignantly upon her, she will be compelled to recognize the necessity for a more definitely Biblical, doctrinal, and theological teaching and challenge than that which seems to prevail within her at the present time. My attitude to the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches has been, for some years now, one of increasing interest and deepening respect, especially in regard to the emphasis placed by these Churches upon the absolutely unique nature of the Christian Church itself, as a spiritual community or fellowship, born

not of human plans, devices or inspiration, but from above, established and sustained alone by the Spirit of God. I believe, moreover, the Roman Catholic Church to have been pre-eminently right, during these modernistic days, in her unfaltering stand for the absolute uniqueness of the Christian Revelation as opposed to all other so-called revelations, and in her consistent emphasis on the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church as those alone which give true expression to the Christian faith. I say this, when, at the same time, I find myself at complete variance with that Church, in the peculiar interpretation she has invariably put upon that which constitutes the real nature both of revelation and of doctrine, and especially, in the uncritical attitude toward these, which this Church has, encouraged, yea, demanded, from her people. It is true that Tertullian's strange and startling declaration concerning the *Christian* revelation, namely, "*Credibile est, quia ineptum est, certum est quia impossibile est,*" and the later Augustinian and Anselmic pronouncements, "*Credo ut intelligam,*" possess a radical significance for the understanding of Christian faith, which the later modernized Protestantism has, significantly enough, either depreciated or ignored altogether. At the same time, *the* Revelation as it comes from God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is never a sort of *esoteric knowledge* transmitted to, and in the custody of, an Institution, however sacred that institution might prove to be. And doctrine is not merely so much *teaching* of a higher kind — *sapientia* in contrast with *scientia* to be received from that institution, by a faith which is blind.

And yet, were one obliged to make a choice between this Roman Catholic view and the modern tendency to universalize revelation, with the accompanying relativism, and with the consequent complete dissolution of a definite doctrinal

understanding of the Christian faith, he must agree with Barth that there could be no difficulty in determining which side he must take. Manifold minor differences which he might have with the Roman Catholic Church could only be of peripheral significance as compared with this matter of central and absolute importance to the whole Christian view of life.

For some years prior and subsequent to the disruption of 1925, the people of the Presbyterian Church of Canada revealed a determination and devotion, a fortitude and a willingness to sacrifice, in many respects, truly admirable. Perhaps, we should acknowledge that, at times, this devotion was too apparently animated by the polemical spirit and accompanied by an unfortunate sectarian bitterness. Nevertheless, the people's instincts, for the most part, were sound, and their faith pointed undoubtedly in the right direction.

Since that time, unfortunately, a change has been apparent. Such change was, indeed, in evidence before the prevailing economic depression had fully set in to bring its additional hardships and perplexities, so that the depression cannot justly be made to account for it. The depression, in fact, should have inclined men toward a deeper religious interest, and made them more ready to sacrifice for the Church's cause. Some have attributed this waning enthusiasm mainly to the fact that the leadership of the church has not been so implicitly trusted as it was in the earlier days. It is possible, however, that we must look deeper for the cause of our trouble, and ask ourselves, indeed, about the very substance of the faith that is in us.

At any rate, there has been since the very beginning a most alarming disregard in certain places for authority, and especially in relation to the essential constitutional requirements of the Church. An undoubted drift toward individual-

ism, sectionalism and Congregationalism has characterized our whole course. So marked have been these and other defects that many have believed that the supreme need is one, in which a definite and distinctive Presbyterian ecclesiastical policy should be set forth and zealously pursued as an ideal. Others have desired a more practical policy, one which would enable ministers more easily to meet the baffling perplexities and problems which confront them every day, and these, due mainly to the economic and social disturbances of our time.

I believe that I can appreciate something of the strength of conviction, and the conditions which have given rise to the urgency, underlying the above claims. At the same time, I am convinced that our real need is a much more profound one, a need, indeed, which more intimately concerns our personal attitude and witness to Jesus Christ. I am thinking here more particularly of those of us who are ministers of the Church, for as the *ministers* are, so, I believe, will the people be. I am thinking also of the true origins of the Reformed faith, and the tremendous significance the unique character of these should have for the faith of Reformed churchmen in this day. Whatever fruits have been born of Modernism, on the one hand, and Fundamentalism, on the other hand, it is obvious to any informed and concerned Christian believer, that these in their characteristic forms are today spent forces, and have no longer vital messages. Neither of them, moreover, has possessed essential relationship to the faith of early Protestantism. And, in view of the resurgence of that faith which is undoubtedly taking place in Europe at the present time, it behooves us to ask again, what is, and what ought to be, our particular witness to Christ in this our day and generation. Once we are sure of this, and are therefore under constraint to propagate this Gospel, ecclesiastical and practical policies

will become vital interests among us again, and will assuredly take care of themselves. Through a renewed understanding of those springs of inspiration which gave rise to the original Reformed Church, three considerations, which would seem to possess special significance for our Church, become more clear and more insistently challenging. In conclusion, therefore, let me no more than indicate what these are.

- 1) A Church, if it is to justify itself as a true Church of God in Jesus Christ, must be conscious of possessing the Gospel.

It is not sufficient that a Church may profess to possess a unique and supreme ideal or great religious ideals, a series of all-important messages or challenges, as is characteristic of Modernism. Nor will it do that a Church, claiming for itself that it stands for and possesses the true doctrine and the purest teaching tested by scriptural standards, presumes to make that fact the basis of all authority, as in rational Orthodoxy. It will not for any length of time prove adequate to profess to have discovered a new and vital life-changing *method* designed especially to reach the "higher-ups," and to identify that with what is essential Christian faith, in accord with the recent Oxford Group Movement. Nor is any profound or permanent good to be expected from the claim to the possession of an all-inclusive and universal mission of love as apparently constitutes the Christian challenge of Kagawa. In the New Testament, "love" is not the supreme theme so far as man is concerned, nor, for that matter, is "sharing," but rather, those strangely perturbing words: "Repent and believe." Only when this challenge has been met, shall men be able to discern the Kingdom of God coming on earth. It is, indeed, never enough to have a gospel for this or any other particular age. A Church,

if it is to remain the Church of Christ, must possess *the* Gospel, that is, *the* "Glad News," *the* "Hope of the Ages."

Preaching must learn to become dogmatic again. Had the 'broad-mindedness' and 'tolerance' characteristic of modern religious pride and superiority come to triumph or even to prevail, in the first two centuries of the Christian era, it is doubtful if the Christian religion itself would possess anything more for the people of today. Those who constituted that early Church were however a dogmatic – indeed, viewed in the light of a certain characteristic form of modern thought – a most ridiculously intolerant people. They considered themselves, and were scornfully denominated by their persecutors as a "third race," "citizens of heaven," the "known of God." As Karl Heim has said: "They did not contend for a modest space in which to practise their religious exercises. They were not vindicating their right to certain religious experiences. No, they came as aggressors. They were conscious that they brought that without which the world must collapse upon itself; that which called in question the whole world of previous culture with all its forms of state and social organization." It is also true, as Heim indicates, that the Christian religion has always a social application; it has intermittently been in deadly conflict with various kinds of vested interests ever since the days of the Emperor Trajan. Nevertheless, to equate essential Christianity with what is known today as Christian Socialism – as is often done – is to be guilty of the most insidious teaching; a teaching more dangerous to the Christian faith, because it can be more plausible, than the modern American New Humanism or the Soviet communistic atheism. And, when understood in its essential nature, Christian Socialism can be seen to be not less Godless than these, for it is presuming to measure both God and man's

need by man's purely humanitarian, oftentimes sentimental, needs as conditioned by a transient world, and as emphasized at the expense of his one supreme eternal need.

The Christian Church, because it is in possession of the Truth – the Revelation – *the* Word of God cannot be other than dogmatic. It is to be remembered, however, that there are two distinct kinds of dogmatism, the one false, the other true. The one kind finds its certainty or basis of authority in truths which have been externally transmitted to men through the Church, or in those which are to be inferred from an infallible Scripture. Such truths are to be uncritically accepted and believed. The other kind is that in which man, having been apprehended by the Truth itself, having had living witness borne to it in faith and by the Holy Spirit, is thus under constraint to affirm that "Jesus is Lord," and to bear witness to that fact. There can be no compromise of any nature in this *kind* of an understanding of, and witness to, Truth. These respective dogmatisms cannot, in any precise way, be identified with specific Churches; they cross our ecclesiastical divisions; but there is a distinction here which is vital, momentous indeed, for all theological understanding and for all true belief. The original Reformed Church was emphatic in stressing this distinction in regard to any saving knowledge of God which man might possess.

To describe the Bible, as was done recently at an assemblage of Presbyterian ministers, as "the most cocksure book in the world," and to conclude from that, that preaching might therefore be of that nature, is to misunderstand completely both the nature of the Bible and the essential character of true preaching. As Professor Eddington reminds us in his Swarthmore lecture to his Quaker friends, "There is a vast difference between cocksureness and certainty." The Bible makes plain

that the incomprehensible God can only be known through the Son, witnessed to by the Holy Ghost. This is also the profoundest significance to be attached to the Trinitarian doctrine. That is to say, God is unknown to man, except through the revelation of Jesus Christ; and Jesus as Christ is unknown except through the witness of the Spirit and the Spirit is unknown except through Jesus Christ. Man can neither possess God nor the Word of God. "No *man* can preach the Word of God," says Karl Barth; and he is surely right. But he adds that God verily makes the Word known to men through *preaching*, especially when preaching is conditioned by the fact that he who preaches has realized the utter impossibility of speaking *God's* Word and yet is under absolute constraint to do so. This is the only permissible dogmatism, but it is a dogmatism which is imperative to Christian faith. St. Paul spoke of "the foolishness of preaching," of "things past finding out," of "mystery;" and yet it was he who said, "...Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel."

2) A true Church of Christ must be essentially and radically missionary in attitude and spirit.

I am not here primarily referring to the fact that a Church, if she is to prosper spiritually, must be conscious of foreign or home missionary obligations, i.e., that she must find herself debtor always, both to those who have not heard the Gospel and to those who according to circumstances may refuse, or lack, the means of Grace. It is to the more fundamental fact, namely, that Christianity, if it is to be considered in the deepest sense distinctive among other religions, is essentially and radically a *mission*, that I would draw special attention. An essential implicate of the faith which is in Christ is the consciousness of belonging to those who are "sent." Apart from

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this, Christianity loses its true meaning. There is something inhering in the Gospel which must propagate itself. And a Church which cannot or does not create its own ministry – that is, one which is obliged to depend upon other Churches for this means of grace – is in a state of decline. A Church, moreover, which has no sufficient challenge to make the “world” apprehensive, which perceives no clear distinction between the Christian and other men, which is not under compulsion and eager to make known the “thing revealed,” is not worthy of its name. The “Ecclesia,” as the word itself denotes, consists of those who are ‘called out,’ who have felt the stinging and humiliating offense of the Cross, who have perceived, at the same time, its absolute necessity if men are to know God – that is, if they are to possess *the* faith and *the* hope. Christians are never missionaries primarily because Christ is reported to have enjoined His followers in the well-known words, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel,” but rather because they themselves possess faith and the consequent implicates of faith.

Important as it is, therefore, to maintain, in the preparation of the ministry of our Church, those high standards in academic training and intellectual attainment for which the Presbyterian Church has always been respected; imperative as it is that the ministry and membership of the Church become truly concerned in regard to ecclesiastical and constitutional requirements, this other matter is of an importance infinitely greater, because it is qualitatively different and has to do with the essential *existence* of the Church itself. That Church which can contemplate with complacency conditions, in which subtle and selfish intrigue, pure ecclesiastical politics and secular ambitions can comfortably prevail, not to say, triumph; in which the conventional moralisms and platitudinisms of a

sophisticated intelligentsia, supported by the *possession* of wealth or so-called social prestige, are respected, is in a very serious position. It is to have substituted the veneer of Christianity for the insight and knowledge of faith.

Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of our whole Presbyterian Church life, during the last eight years, has been a direct result of the sustained efforts of our Women's Missionary Society. To this work more than to anything else can be attributed the preservation of a true missionary spirit in the Church. It would be a mistake to infer that all missionary activity has been permeated by the *missionary spirit*, for this missionary spirit is a much rarer product than is often assumed. It is of the Spirit, and comes only by faith. Other and quite different interests may and do cause people to participate in this work; but it is a fact that for years the Women's Missionary Society of our Church has taken the Missionary cause seriously. These women have persistently encouraged the study of the conditions of our mission fields and have been genuinely gladdened in heart by the work itself, and the results attained. The serious interest which has been theirs in this direction has indeed become a means of grace unto themselves, and they have thus become true leaven in our Church. In truth, we cannot apply ourselves in this way to a study of concrete missionary work without it becoming a veritable Word of God to us, not only as a challenge to support a worthy cause, but as something which must disturb all superficial views of the Christian faith which we may possess. Were any authentication needed to reveal the genuineness of this Society's work, were indeed a verification required of the soundness of the faith which still exists in Presbyterian homes and congregations, we need only draw attention to those splendid examples of Christian young womanhood who in recent years

have given themselves, without condition or reserve, to the work in British Guiana, India, China, Formosa and Japan. I venture to say, as one of their teachers, that no more devoted and intelligent band of young missionaries has gone forth from any church to the foreign field in many years. One of that number has already forfeited her life for this cause. She knew what it meant to be 'called' and to be 'sent,' and though gone, she has truly become God's Word to the Church she served.

"Mission, Gospel preaching," writes Emil Brunner of the Barthian school, "is spreading out the fire which Christ has thrown on the earth. He who does not propagate this fire shows that he is not burning. He who burns propagates the fire."

How profoundly true his words!

3) A true Church of Christ must be catholic.

I mean by the word 'catholic' that which was its original and only true meaning, namely, a claim on the part of the Church to a universal mission, owing to the fact that the Church possesses the absolute Gospel authorized by God. It is a Gospel, which the Church is under constraint to preach and propagate, and which must ultimately triumph. To have this conception of the Church is to be conscious of the fact that the Gospel is imperative, that it is the final power on earth, and must be supreme over every other claim in the Christian conscience.

In an early section of this book, I made the observation that we must not permit our Presbyterianism to become provincial. We must seek to stand upon the broadest basis which Presbyterianism represents, but more especially we must find our relationship with it in its most original and

truest witness to Christ. However deeply indebted we are to the Presbyterianism of Scotland, England and Ireland, we must never forget that our roots are even more deeply planted. There are, it is to be admitted, peculiar elements in British Presbyterianism which have truly enhanced and enriched that form of Christian faith, which can be traced directly to the ancient Celtic Church. But the Presbyterianism which has prevailed and triumphed there finds its origin not in Clonard nor in Lindisfarne nor in Iona, but in Geneva. And the Genevan Presbyterianism is far more profound and challenging because it is essentially theological rather than ecclesiastical. The Celtic Church knew nothing of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solī deo gloria*. We have to confess indeed that British Presbyterianism has never been so profoundly established upon *this* spiritual and theological insight, as have been certain phases of Presbyterianism to be found on the continent of Europe. Scotland has produced only one truly great theologian, and he was condemned for heresy and denied the right to minister in the Church of Scotland. Tendencies today, therefore, to seek a true lineage in the Celtic Church betray the fact that we are losing or have lost that *vision of God* which turned Europe upside down in the 16th century. It cannot be too strongly asserted that virile Presbyterianism is theologically, rather than ecclesiastically, centred.

Moreover, the day of the "Church of the Colonies," adjuncts of some branch of the Church of Scotland, from which colonial Churches received guidance, supervision, material aid and a supply of ministers, is fortunately passing. The history of Presbyterianism in Canada, as compared with that of the other dominions, has been singularly free from such influences. For upwards of a century now the Canadian Presbyterian Church has been independent in the highest

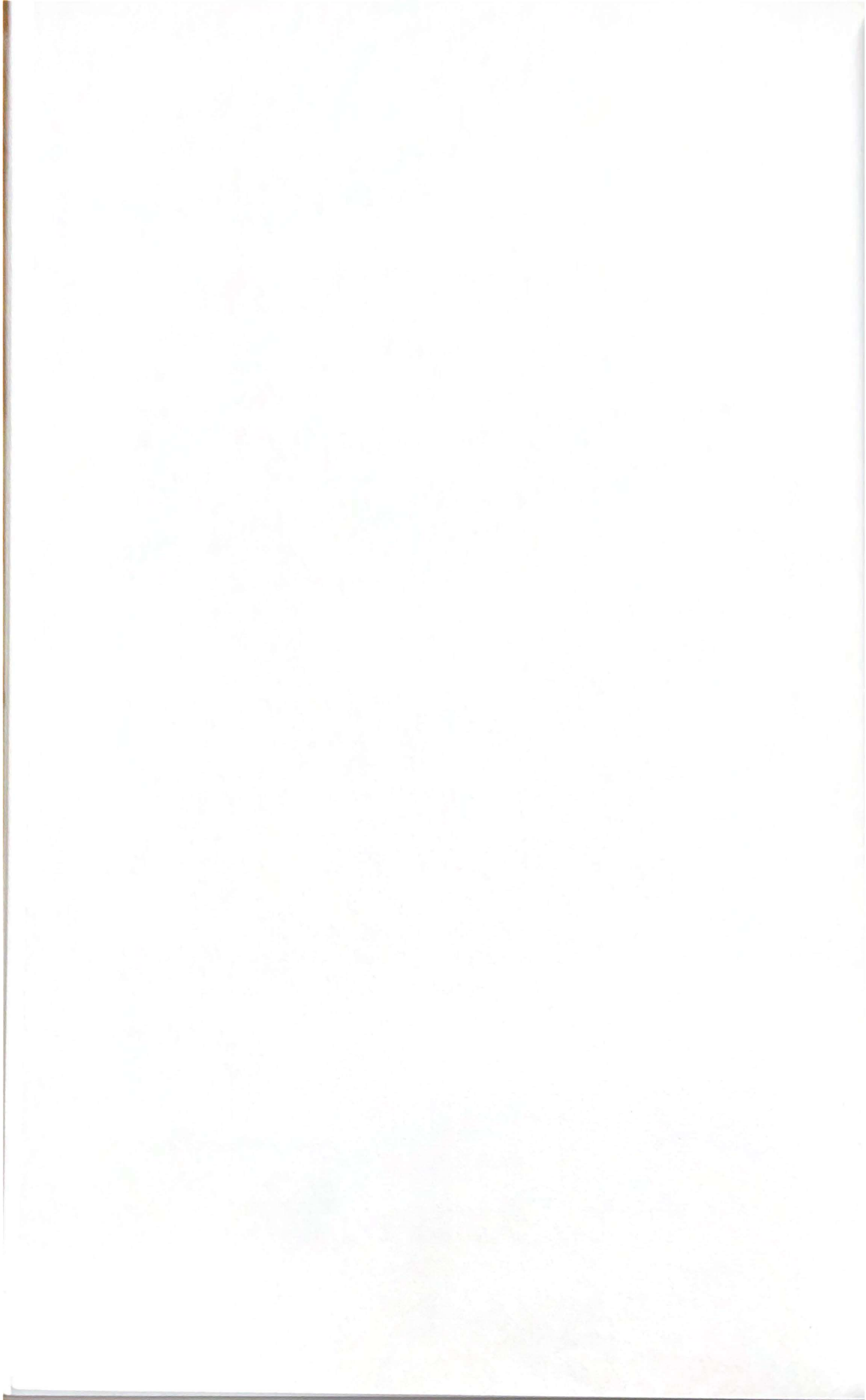
sense. And even the real beginnings of this Church are not as so many suppose to be directly traced to the Church of Scotland. The truth is, that the Church of Scotland proper only responded to constant pleadings for assistance, when a very catholic type of Presbyterianism, based strictly on a definite theological understanding of the Gospel, was well established and in a flourishing condition in this country. Presbyterianism was established in the provinces by the sea by the original Secession Churches, Burgher and Anti-Burgher, by the original Reformed Church, and even at an earlier date by French Huguenots. Lower Canada was indebted for its Presbyterianism also to Huguenots, but more especially to British army chaplains and settlers who made their way to that part of Canada after the capture of Quebec, and later, after the American War of Independence. Organized Presbyterianism came to Upper Canada mainly through the efforts of Presbyterian Associations of different kinds which existed in the United States.

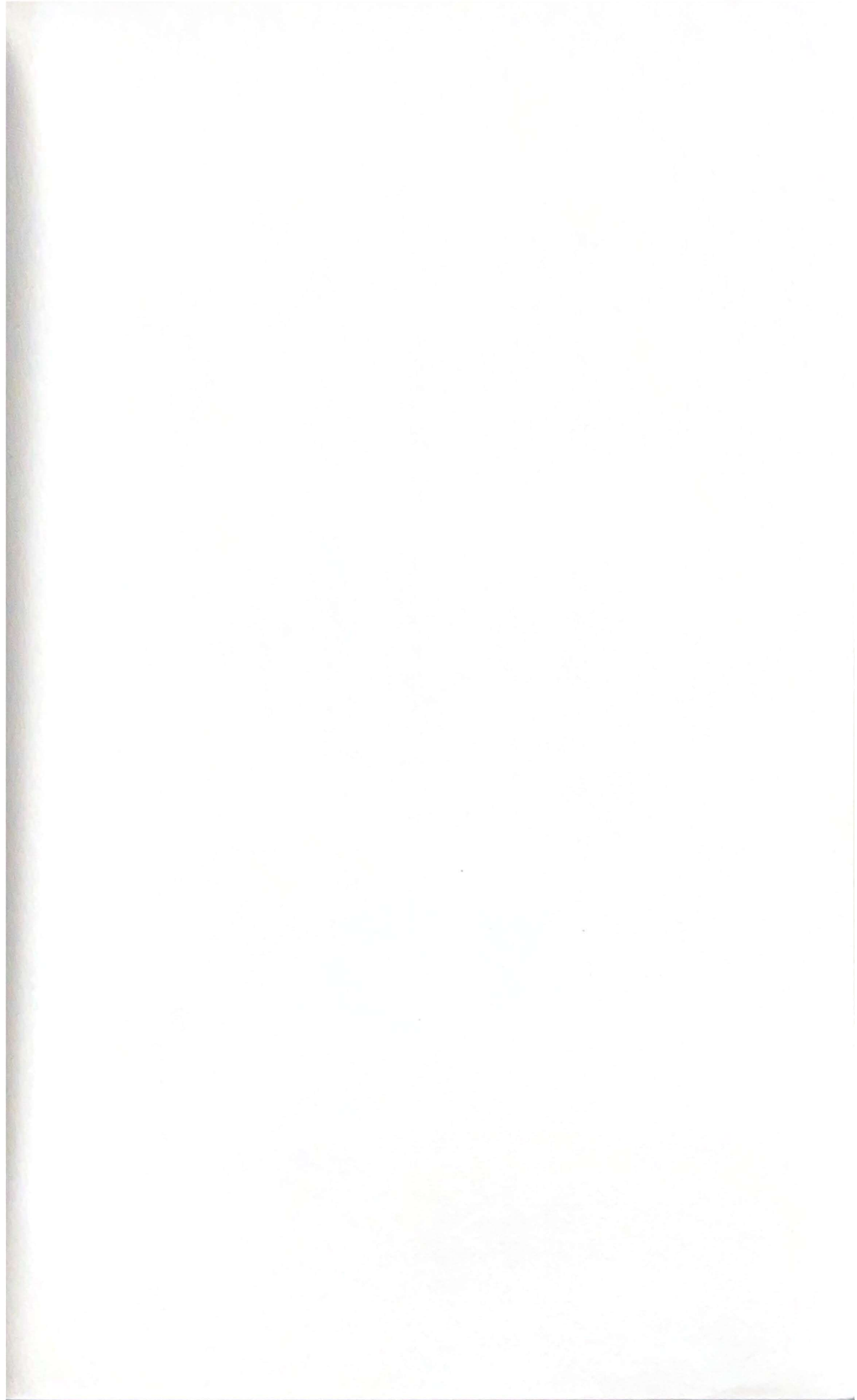
Of the training colleges, Pictou Academy and Dalhousie University are mainly the products of the efforts of a Secession minister, the famous Dr. Thomas McCulloch. It will be inferred from what I have already said that it was at a comparatively late period that the various later branches of the Church of Scotland made their influence felt. Queen's College, Kingston, which is at present a college of the United Church, was established by those interested in the established Church of Scotland about the time of the disruption of the Scottish Church in 1843, while Knox College, Toronto, was originally, and had continued to be up until 1925, a characteristically Free Church institution, both in spirit and outlook. Until that time, none except those of Free Church convictions had at any time occupied chairs in that College.

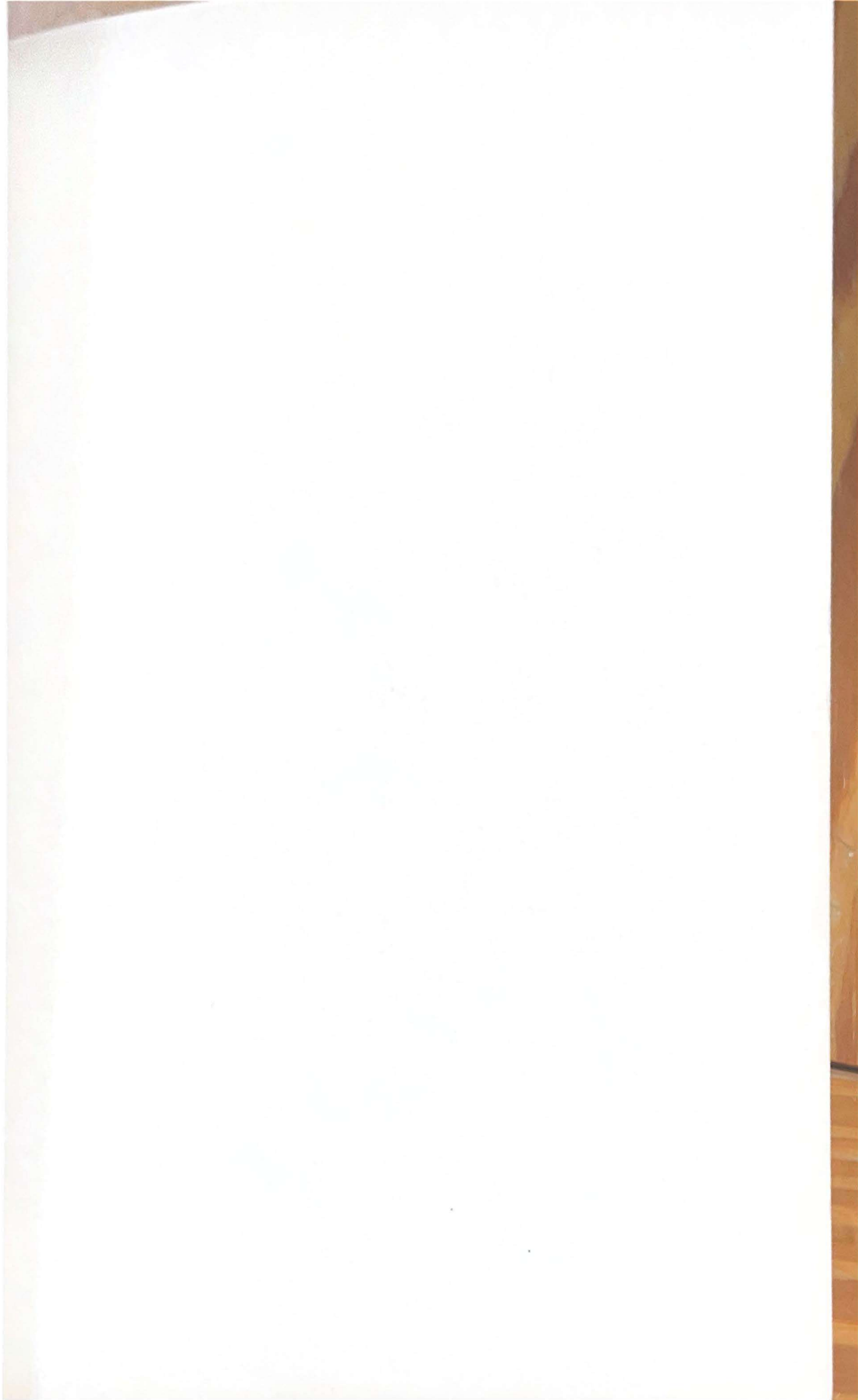
Montreal Presbyterian College, if we are to judge from the prevailing character of the membership of its staff, has also been predominantly Free Church, during the greater part of its history.

It may be seen then that the Presbyterianism of Canada has been of a truly catholic type; and a truly Canadian Presbyterian ministry therefore can only view with serious misgiving, and, if necessary, meet with the most strenuous opposition, any tendency, either to make this Church sectarian in character, or to mould it after some "particular" pattern of Presbyterianism to which a few individual ministers may happen to be strongly inclined.









When Walter W. Bryden published his second book, *Why I Am a Presbyterian*, in 1934, he was little known outside of academic circles and the two pastoral charges where he had served. With this book, he came to the attention of the churches across Canada. His reputation continued to grow over the following decades. Comments by colleagues indicate the esteem in which he was held.

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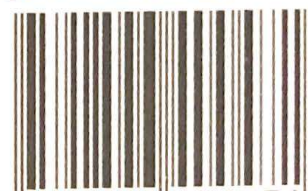


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